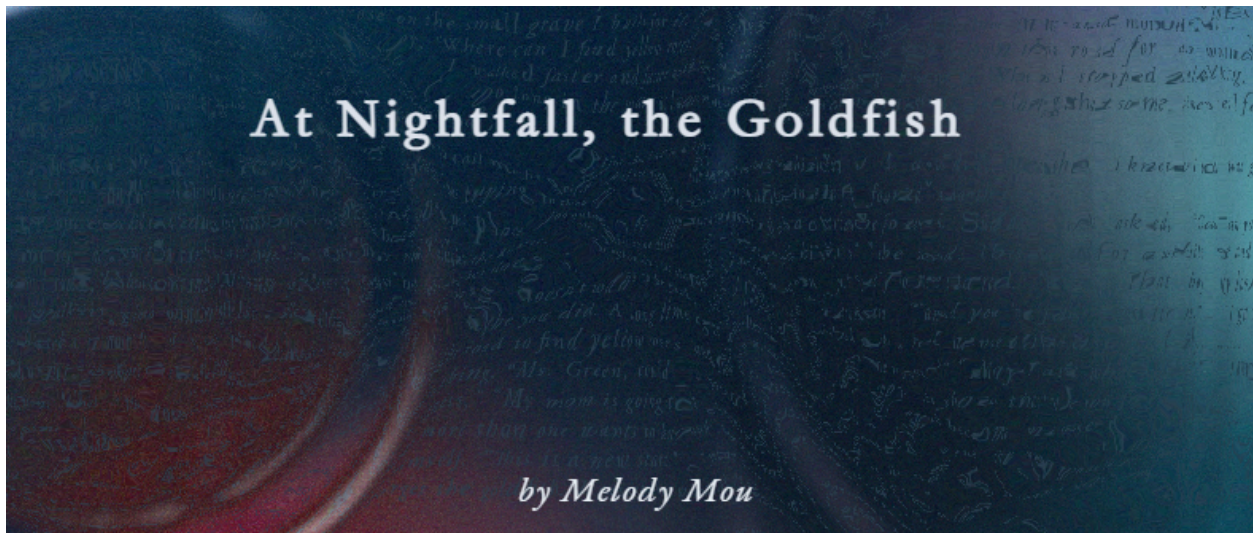


# At Nightfall, the Goldfish - A Review

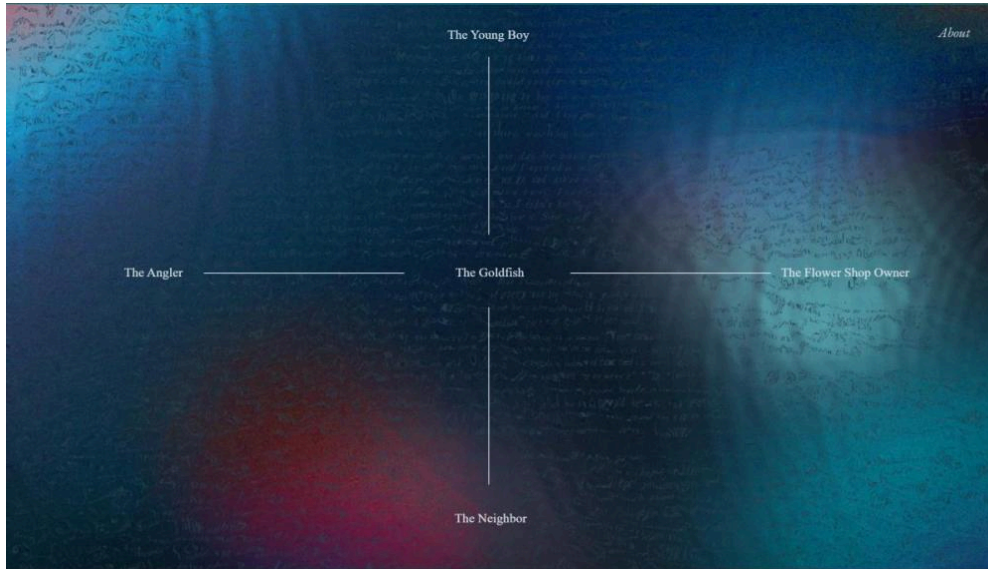


***“What can you do if your future has already been written in the past?”***

[“At Nightfall, the Goldfish”](#), published in 2021, is a work of hypertext fiction where each chapter outlines one character’s life experience using first person. The stories begin to overlap, making the reader wonder if they are reading five separate stories or one connected story.

## **The Experience**

As a hypertext fiction, interaction and discovery are at the core of the storytelling. Visually stunning, as the reader moves their cursor around the page, a rippling effect appears in the water behind the words, obscuring the text beneath. On the first page, the reader clicks on the title to reveal a new page with five characters’ names: The Young Boy, The Angler, The Neighbor, The Flower Shop Owner, and The Goldfish.



Click on one of the names, and a short, disjointed poem appears. For example, when clicking on “The Angler”, the following appears with each word separated from the next: “I was disturbed. You looked. We hesitated. She muttered. That boy said, ‘Forget the past. Feel sun setting.’”

Each of the individual words is clickable and reveals more information about the character in that moment, disclosing the full story of that moment for that character. After the entire incident from that character’s perspective is complete and the reader clicks “Continue,” the main page with the characters’ names changes with words from the poem connecting that character to another.

As more narratives are revealed, the reader begins to realize that these are all stories of the same individual. Themes of life, death, loss, and reincarnation are explored. After all five characters’ stories are revealed, all of the characters are connected to each other by the words on the main page.



## Review

The author of this piece, [Melody Mou Peijing](#), is a media artist whose work addresses issues of ecology and experimental narrative through computational technologies. On the “About” page on the “At Nightfall, the Goldfish” website, she explains the meaning of the work:

“This piece uses many symbols of life and death. To some extent, these stories represent different periods of life. They indicate the whole life of the young boy, from a child to an old man.”

The twist is that all of these characters are indeed the same person at different points in their life, even though they are interacting with each other. This is discovered as the reader chooses their own path through the story, making connections between the characters and their stories. The reader’s discovery over time shows the author’s craftsmanship of designing a multi-sequential structure where individual pieces can stand alone and yet will give insights into the various connections when the others are read, regardless of the order that the reader chooses.

While short, the poignant statement of life in its stages and how it flows makes it emotionally engaging throughout. The discovery and anticipation of the connections between the characters also make it intellectually engaging.

One question came to mind after reading the piece and looking through the “About” page. The author supplies a link to a non-interactive version of the story, which puts the characters’ stories in this order: The Goldfish, The Angler, The Neighbor, The Flower Shop Owner, The Young Boy. I appreciate the thoughtfulness in regards to accessibility, but it makes me wonder if this is the preferred or “ideal” order for the best twists and reveals. I chose to read it in the reverse of this order, but still understood the connections and meaning. One twist that was revealed extremely

early, however, was that The Young Boy remembers being The Goldfish. Perhaps if I had chosen to begin with The Flower Shop Owner or The Neighbor, it would have been more subtle and more of a twist at the end. Still, the structure is masterful and creates suspense throughout and a feeling of resolution at the end.

One aspect not yet discussed thoroughly is the visual design of “At Nightfall, the Goldfish.” By obscuring the words under the water with the ripples, which are in fact the text from the story, it takes on a quality of almost knowing. This mirrors the character’s experience of almost knowing the connections between each other, but not quite. We obscure our ability to fully know and understand. In this way, the animated water ripples brought about by the reader’s movement brings the story to life.

### **Rating**

I rate this work 5 out of 5 stars. While I’m not typically drawn to poetry, the narrative quality, story structure, and visual elements of this multi-linear hypertext fiction immersed me in the world of “At Nightfall, the Goldfish.”