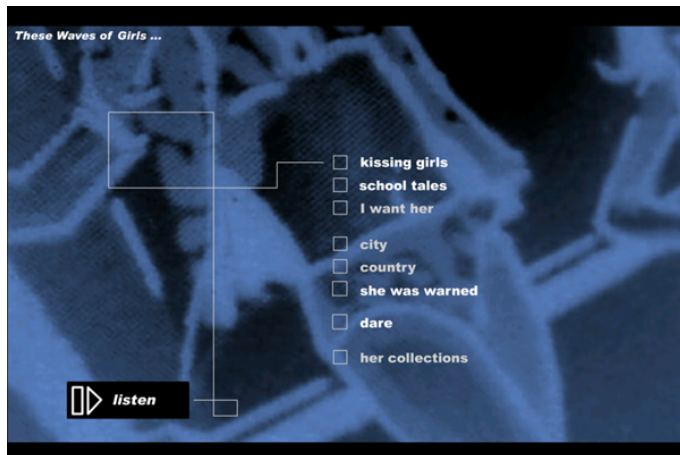


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Caitlin Fisher's *These Waves of Girls* as Hypertext Fiction

Upon its release in 2001, Caitlin Fisher's *These Waves of Girls* was awarded the International Electronic Literature Award for Fiction, and it is now considered to be a foundational work in the broader field of digital literature. The work considers themes of sexuality, memory, and growing up as a girl, with a series of passages from the point of view of a girl at different ages in her life. Links embedded within passages drop the reader into the



middle of disparate but connected stories, creating a stream-of-consciousness style where the reader can choose when to deviate from or follow a specific "pathway". Fisher embeds a series of audio files that narrate the passages, along with various esoteric photos, collages, and animations that augment the tone of the piece.

I cannot claim to have viewed every individual passage from *These Waves of Girls*. Although I tried to read as many as I could, the passages that each link leads to are difficult to predict, and the sheer density of possible links within each passage creates an almost overwhelming feeling. Much like the fluidity of memory and innerworkings of the brain, it is difficult to know where a specific thought (or link) might lead. And it feels almost antithetical to the work to map out the pathways. Each small memory, and interconnection gains its power from the fleeting nature of not always being able to navigate to that branch again. The stories are more interesting because the reader must make the choice to either click a link in the middle

or scroll/navigate to the next passage, often meaning that they will miss out on parts of the narrative in favor of a new section.

These Waves of Girls uses several experimental techniques to maintain reader interest. At times text scrolls across the page, interactive animations respond to the cursor as if “squeezed”, and the reader is forced to click through at the pace that each memory unfolds. The novella tackles mature subjects regarding sex, cruelty, and sexual harassment. However, Fisher does so with tact while maintaining a confessional tone and mood that can be just as freeing and as it can be uncomfortable. The work relies on an unreliable narrator who is often framed as both victim and villain in the stories they recount. At the same time, there are several relatable moments surrounding the uncertainty and mistakes that come with growing up.

Overall, it is easy to see why *These Waves of Girls* has been received so positively. It uses the hypertext format to provide the reader with agency in determining the pace and details of the narrative while grounding them in the constantly changing world of a multidimensional and complex narrator. Fisher doesn't shy away from the uncomfortable and terrifying parts of girlhood while weaving her story of a girl learning to live while exploring her desires, regrets, and sexuality. For this reason, I give it 5 out of 5 stars.

Caitlin Fisher's *These Waves of Girls* can be found at:

<https://the-next.eliterature.org/exhibition/afterflash/fisher-these.html>