

0169-1

Faculty Development Grant Proposal – March 1998

**Multi-Media Presentation of the Cosmological Poem
“Frühlingsfeier” (“Spring: A Celebration”) by F. G. Klopstock**

submitted by William B. Fischer
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Abstract

I propose to produce a multi-media presentation of a core text of 18th-Century literature in order to explore how new technological resources can help contemporary students regain the experience of literature as a living event. The text was chosen both for its literary merit and its amenity to multi-media presentation. It is a document which vividly expresses, from alienation to renewed hope, the emotional force of the conflict of modern cosmology with traditional religious belief.

The production will include vocal rendition of the text, audio-visual resources that convey its themes and images, and an on-line apparatus of background literature and critical analysis. This version would then be the basis for requests for external funding to support a larger project that would expand the present undertaking in two ways: 1) create an interactive-adaptive mode that would allow students to customize the text rendition and selection of media to explore different responses; and 2) establish a paradigm for developing similar modules to present the many other literary texts, in many languages, that express the human response to the transformation of nature and our place in it that occurred with the rise of modern science and technology.

Outline of Multi-media Project

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Interactive Presentation and Performance of the Cosmological Poem "Frühlingsfeier" ("Spring: A Celebration") by F. G. Klopstock

Background

The study of literature, and especially poetry, is seldom a successful part of education. While many gritty social and curricular problems are involved, the teaching and appreciation of literature suffer also from a weakness in *medium*. We might discern two aspects of that weakness:

- 1) Our students, and thus our subsequent mature citizens, view literature as dead words on a neatly-printed page. The notion of literature as performance and experience is now foreign to most of us, though we may have replaced the performance and experience of *literature* with other forms of entertainment and information. And yet originally much literature was conveyed through performance or at least through reading aloud. In any case the printed and read word, even when experienced silently, was a central rather than a peripheral medium, and thus attracted and maintained the attention of its audience.
- 2) Our students, even when they are willing to make their way through a literary text, are often cut off from its fundamental, original *context* — both the immediate background of the work, and the wider cultural context: the physical environment, social issues, and corresponding cultural phenomena of the time. They thus lack the background knowledge that allows the text to fit its world, to convey its meaning, and to have its legitimate effect.

My project seeks to overcome those insufficiencies in medium and cultural environment. I propose to create a multi-media "performance" of a significant older poem, a text whose content makes it especially suitable for multi-media presentation. The performance consist of a dramatic recitation of the text integrated with video and audio elements that correspond to the content of the poem and demonstrate its ties to its social and cultural environment. In its proposed ultimate version the project would allow the student to move from this rather passive experience of a performance to a much more active role by allowing the construction of widely varying unique individual versions of the performance from a repertory of alternate video and audio resources stored on disc. That activity implicitly but strongly demands that the learner develop a critical interpretation of the poem — not by conventional analysis, but rather by experimentation and judgment.

The Poem

"Frühlingsfeier" (1759) is one of the most significant poems in German literature before Goethe. It is a major document in the shift from the Rococo and Enlightenment poetry to the much more dynamic style and seriousness of thought that reached a peak during the Storm and Stress, Classicism, and Romanticism. The poem is frequently included in literature survey courses and specialized advanced courses, though its fascinating scientific theme is not usually emphasized. Central to the poem is the interaction between the Biblical / intuitive / "telluric" view of the world and the new "planetary" cosmology that became prominent in the Enlightenment. Topically, it reflects the Kant(-Laplace) notion of nebular planetary evolution (1755). The tension between the two world-views appears both as an intellectual event and as the cause of emotional crisis which gives the poem its power.

"Frühlingsfeier" has a vibrant "plot" and masses of spectacular imagery, both features which make it especially suitable for multi-media presentation. The poem's "speaker" ecstatically but fearfully views the "ocean of worlds" revealed by the new cosmology, and still wishes to maintain his faith in the God and the special nature of creation. He zeroes in ("hovers around") the Earth as imagined from space, and envisions it as a "droplet" that flowed from God's hand when the universe was created. The perspective then becomes terrestrial and the speaker walks through nature, wondering whether its small inhabitants, including an insect larva, might somehow turn out to be "alas, not immortal." The mood oscillates rapidly between elation and despair. Then comes a storm, and in the near-misses of its lightning strikes the speaker senses the power and mercy of God. Refreshing, nourishing rain comes, and with it the rainbow that symbolizes peace.

Stages and Formats of Development

1. slide show with tape (conventional production)
2. transfer to VHS (stills and some video), either conventionally or through on-computer editing;
3. image- and sound-processing on computer, and record as video
4. on-computer multi-media performance / presentation using CD-ROM or laser disc with auxiliary features (background information on music, text, etc.); performance / presentation as interactive / adaptive courseware (allow observer to construct own version of poem)
5. a series of perhaps 10 such performances of landmark poetic texts; the collection could serve as an accompaniment to introductory literature courses or the core of a special-topics course in either lyric poetry or else science and technology in literature
6. expansion to other literatures, including English

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Die

Multimedia Experience



QUIT

HELP

Choose a Poem >>>

"Die Frühlingsfeier" by Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock



"Die Frühlingsfeier" by Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock



QUIT

HELP

Poem List

ACTIVITIES

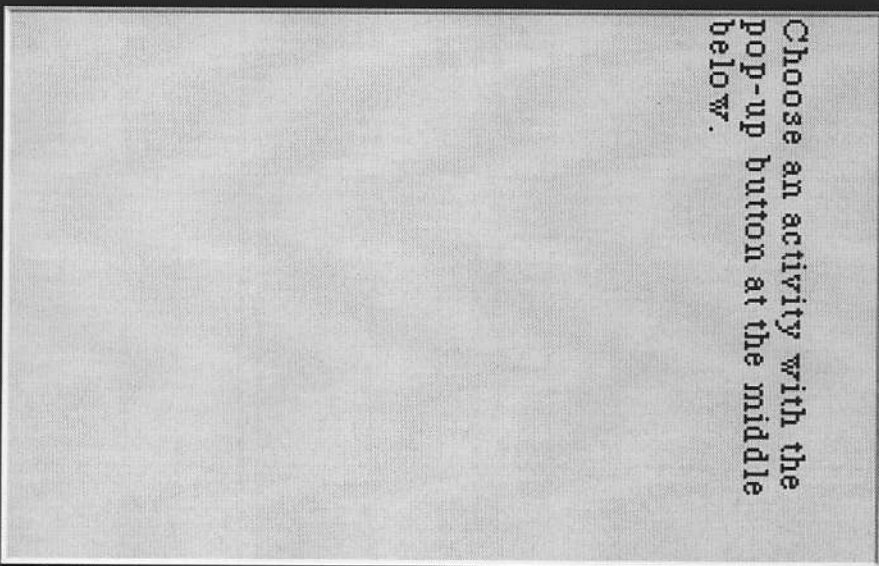
Read and Hear the P... ▼

RESOURCES

Search Games... ▼



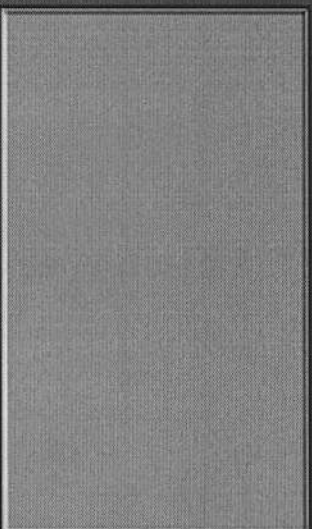
Choose an activity with the pop-up button at the middle below.



- (01) Select poem text display mode: ORIGINAL
- (02) Insert MUSIC, PICTURE or EFFECT
- (03) Wait 1 second
- (04) Insert MUSIC, PICTURE or EFFECT
- (05) Music 00001 (24 seconds) || volume: FULL | allow next sound to overlap this one: NO

(06) Insert MUSIC, PICTURE or EFFECT

- (07) Picture 00031
- (08) Insert MUSIC, PICTURE or EFFECT
- (09) Verse 1 (13 seconds) || allow next sound to overlap this one: NO
- (10) Insert MUSIC, PICTURE or EFFECT
- (11) Verse 2 (12 seconds) || allow next sound to overlap this one: NO
- (12) Insert MUSIC, PICTURE or EFFECT



- Music 00001 (24 seconds) He's Got the Whole World in His Hands (first verse solo)
- Music 00002 (26 seconds) He's Got the Whole World in His Hands (duet with counter melody)
- Music 00003 (24 seconds) He's Got the Whole World in His Hands (contralto joined by soprano)

• I want  to insert a music segment. ▼

(06) Insert MUSIC, PICTURE or EFFECT

- Picture 00001 tractor in wheat field
- Picture 00002 red farmhouse, barn, on tall hillside
- Picture 00003 white farmhouse and outbuildings on green plain
- Picture 00004 grain elevator on stubble field with bare mountains
- Picture 00005 very red sunset with clouds
- Picture 00006 violet clouds

HELP

Return to main activity screen

PERFORMANCE

Full-Scale Performance on Main Screen ▼