

# Cambridge Elements

Elements in Publishing and Book Culture

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## PRE-WEB DIGITAL PUBLISHING AND THE LORE OF ELECTRONIC LITERATURE

Astrid Ensslin

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University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom

One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA

477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia

314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre,  
New Delhi – 110025, India

103 Penang Road, #05–06/07, Visioncrest Commercial, Singapore 238467

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[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)

Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9781108828888](http://www.cambridge.org/9781108828888)

DOI: 10.1017/9781108903165

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First published 2022

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.*

ISBN 978-1-108-82888-8 Paperback

ISSN 2514-8524 (online)

ISSN 2514-8516 (print)

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# Pre-web Digital Publishing and the Lore of Electronic Literature

Elements in Publishing and Book Culture

DOI: 10.1017/9781108903165

First published online: March 2022

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**ABSTRACT:** This Element examines a watershed moment in the recent history of digital publishing through a case study of a pre-web, serious hypertext periodical, the *Eastgate Quarterly Review of Hypertext (EQRH)* (1994–1995). Early hypertext writing relied on stand-alone, mainframe computers and specialized authoring software. With the Web launching as a mass distribution platform, the *EQRH* faced a fast-evolving technological landscape paired with an emergent gift and open-access economy. Its nonlinear writing experiments afford key insights into historical, medium-specific authoring practices. Access constraints have left the *EQRH* under-researched and threatened by obsolescence. To address this challenge, this study offers platform-specific analyses of all of the *EQRH*'s cross-media materials, including works that have hitherto escaped scholarly attention. It deploys a form of conceptually oral ethno-historiography: the lore of electronic literature. The Element deepens our understanding of the North American publishing industry's history and contributes to the overdue preservation of early digital writing.

This Element also has a video abstract: [www.cambridge.org/ensslin](http://www.cambridge.org/ensslin)

**KEYWORDS:** Eastgate, electronic literature, hypertext, lore, pre-web digital publishing

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ISBNs: 9781108828888 (PB), 9781108903165 (OC)

ISSNs: 2514-8524 (online), 2514-8516 (print)

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