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My Mother painted its name  
in neat white letters.  
across the toy boat's blue stern  
Its name was PENELOPE.
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its name was Penelope  
dawn or SEA or stop
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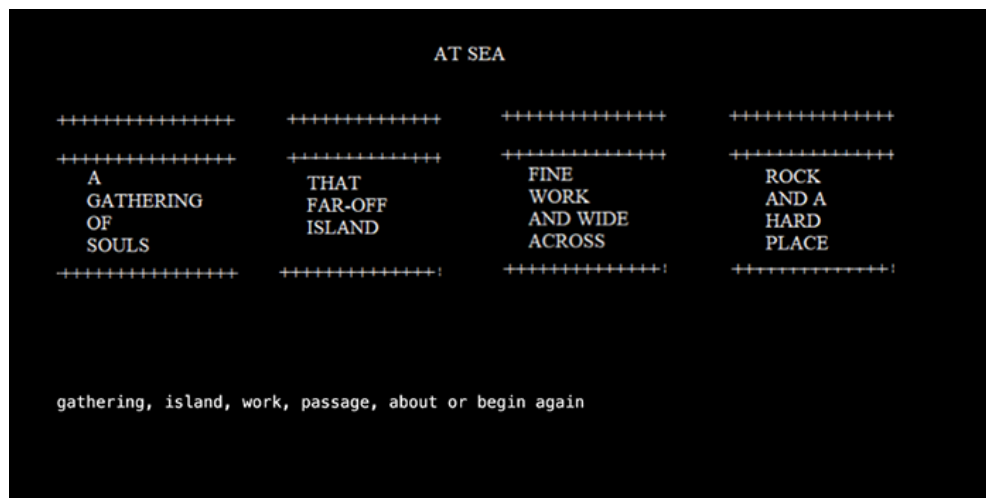
A passage taken from the "Dawn" section of the story.

Its name was Penelope is a hypertext fiction that tells the story of an artist, Ann Mitchell, and her life, written by Judy Malloy. It was first published in 1989 as an artist book for an exhibition at the Richmond Art Center. Later in 1993, it was published by Eastgate. Two copies of the 1993 version are preserved at the Electronic Literature Organization's The NEXT: Museum, Library, and Preservation Space, hosted at Washington State University Vancouver. The story contains parts of Malloy's life woven into the narrative. As a hypertext fiction, the story takes a much different format than a traditional book. Readers are introduced to the story with a title page. A short chime is played, and we can click to further navigate to the main story. The story contains different passages of text that are randomized on each view. With each new passage we learn a bit more about the main character's story. The work consists of three sections: Dawn, SEA, and Song, which represent different portions of Ann's life.

The story starts off with its first section, Dawn. All the textual passages here, and in SEA, are randomized. Dawn must be viewed first, however after navigating to SEA, readers are able to move between different sections of the work. Some of the passages feel like they could be linear, if you copied and pasted them together into one document. Others however, stand alone. Passages in the Dawn section pertain to the character's childhood. She talks about things like her church and religious experiences. She throws things into the water underneath a bridge and watches them come out the other side. She plays in tidepools, watches a baseball game, plays with a wooden train, or listens to her father read her the *Odyssey*, just to name a few examples. Dawn as a section does a great job at showcasing the innocence of childhood. Ann is protected from the hardships and struggles of life as a child. In the Dawn section we learn the origin for the name of this piece.

The second section, SEA, consists of four separate parts: A Gathering of Souls, That Far-Off Island, Fine Work and Wide Across, and finally Rock and a Hard Place. The first of the four parts of SEA talks about Ann's experiences and her friend who passed due to the AIDS epidemic. In this part of the story she goes to parties, meets with friends, gets drunk, and is very much a stereotypical young college adult. Though in all four parts of SEA she is a young adult, it

is more obvious in the first section. The next part of SEA tells the story of Ann’s love interest. The author walks us through both happy and sad times during their relationship. It was not clear if they were officially a couple, but they were very close and intimate with each other. Eventually it seems they do part ways, as Ann does not want to live with him. The next part of SEA talks about her photography and the work she does with it. She photographs the boat that was named Penelope, her peers, scenery, and more. Not all, but much of the passages are told through the lens of her camera. The final section of SEA tells the story of the struggles of adulthood, work life, not having enough income, and not being able to eat because of the lack of money. All of these sections had at least one passage that was the same or very similar at least to the last to tie them all together. The final section of the piece, called Song, is not randomized. This section is linear and finishes off the story by detailing her life as an older adult. Not that she is elderly here, but she seems more mature than the sections in SEA. She is more content, less stressed, and seems to get along with her partner well.



The "SEA" section of the story.

A major part of this story is the quotes from the *Odyssey*. Dene Grigar explains these connections in her essay, *On Memory, Muses, and its name was Penelope*.

The correlation between Homer’s heroine and Malloy’s is interesting in that both stories feature strong female leads in stories not titled after them: in Homer’s story, it’s the “man of many turns” (Ody. 1.1), the heroine’s husband Odysseus; in Malloy’s, it’s the sailboat the heroine played with as a child. While Homer’s Penelope has been lauded through time for her circumspection and domestic role as wife and mother, Malloy’s Ann resonates with a contemporary audience precisely because she is allowed agency and faces many agons because of it as any Greek male hero. Ann through her adventures (and misadventures) becomes for us the Penelope for our time. (Grigar)

When reading through *its name was Penelope* it was important to me that I was able to read every passage within every section of the story. This was not amazingly easy, since each passage is randomized upon clicking the “next” link. My strategy consisted of reading through Dawn first, since this was only accessible in the beginning. I kept a tab open for each main

portion of the work, Dawn, SEA, and Song. I then used the “next” link to repeatedly cycle through each passage, so that I could read each one. When it got to the point that I was clicking the “next” link and I no longer was getting anything new, that is when I moved onto SEA. This was difficult to gage because occasionally I would go for a while without getting anything new and would be ready to move on. Then a new passage would come out of nowhere. This made me believe that some passages were coded to be repeated more often, but after finishing the whole work I don’t necessarily still believe this. The nature of true randomization is that some things just get repeated more often than others. In an article by Ben Cohen for Business Insider, he writes that Spotify, a popular music streaming service, had to craft an “artificial randomization” feature (Cohen). This was because users were getting frustrated that some songs would get repeated too often, and Spotify remedied this by creating an algorithm that gave more variety. The concept of true randomization is interesting, and I speculate that repeated passages showing up more often in the story is a similar effect. When reading with the randomization, I feel as though I am peering into the characters mind and getting a glimpse into her life through the memories that come up. I find sometimes that I will remember random occurrences in my lifetime regardless of whether they pertain to the situation at hand. The story replicates this in the story in the same way a series of flashbacks would. The last portion of the story, Song, was not randomized. Readers can read through this section linearly and will be prompted when the story is finish. The contrast between the last section and the rest of the story is interesting. Ann is in a much better headspace here than the last sections and perhaps the lack of randomization indicates this. It would make sense that she would be able to parse through her thoughts in a much more organized and linear fashion.

This work could have a number of different readers. The story goes over a lot of different concepts that a lot of people can relate to. From childhood innocence, to trying to find your place as a young adult, to relationship troubles, to struggling with money and hunger or resources, and even trying to process yourself artistically (for Ann, this is through photography). For older audiences this story also talks about the AIDs epidemic. Though this happened before me, I can draw connections through the COVID pandemic. Both caused the deaths of a tragic number of people, and both were made worse through a lack of government intervention. I will not claim to know how the author might have felt living through the AIDs epidemic, but I will say that I was able to relate to some of the other themes in the SEA portion. This portion talks about young adulthood and the struggles that come with it. The character Ann here, struggles with drinking at some points in the story. It is not made clear if she explicitly has an alcoholism problem, but she does get drunk on numerous occasions and at one point even drives home while clearly very intoxicated, having to pull over to throw up. Using alcohol and drugs as a coping mechanism is common amongst teenagers and young adults. It is easier to ignore your troubles this way, and for this reason, those who struggle with this can see themselves in this story. For those who don’t, this story still touches on other themes common amongst young adults. For my generation, especially recently, a lack of money is a huge problem. In this story Ann can be seen searching for change in her car and in dumpsters. She steals calories in the form of creamer from her work. She notes that she will not be able to eat for the days leading up to payday. Not exclusive to my generation by any means, but a lot of my companions have had this same experience. Another big theme in this story was relationships amongst peers, platonic and intimate. All people of any

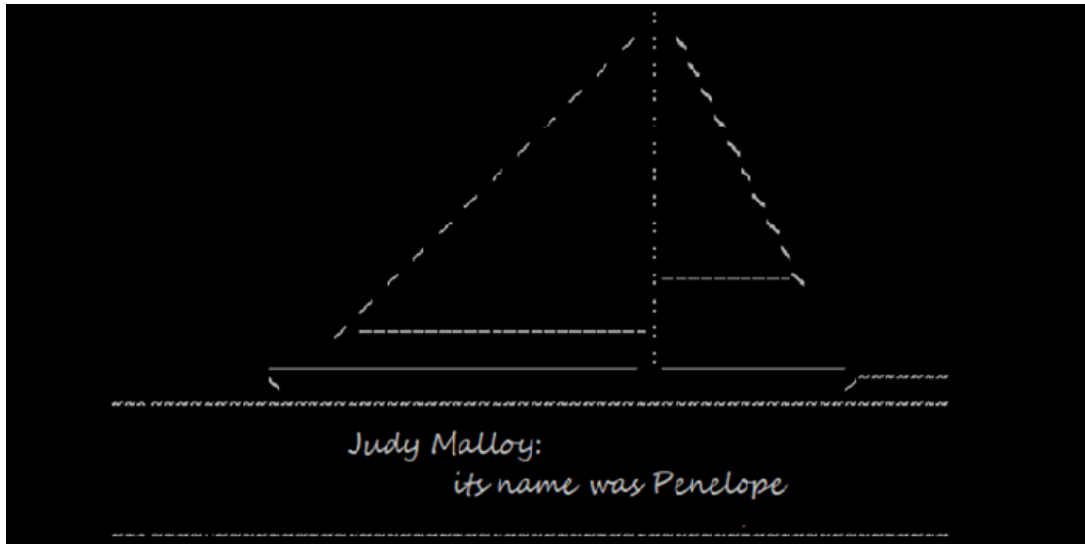
age would be able to relate to this, as the ups and downs of interpersonal relationships are unavoidable in life. Humans are social creatures and relationships are necessary. Any reader would be able to relate to at least one of the themes presented in this story. The work could have a wide variety of audiences.

Just as there could be many audiences, there could be many purposes that Judy Malloy could have written this story. For me, it is very therapeutic to write down my thoughts, this story could have been a creative outlet for her. In the article written by Dene Grigar, she notes that Malloy included some of her own experiences in her work (Grigar). This is common amongst artists and writers. With the many relatable themes in the work, the story's purpose could be to tell a relatable tale. One that consists of the struggles of life and being human, which is such a complex and unique experience. Most stories, in some way do this. I enjoy expressing myself and including my own experiences in my work even if it is not in a way that is explicitly obvious. This is part of what will make readers want to engage with the work. Being a relatable story allows readers to put themselves in the character or narrator's shoes, so they can sympathize and empathize with the story.

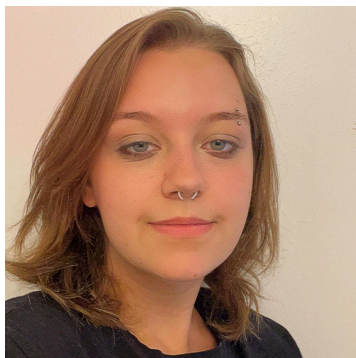
There are many digital elements that make *its name was Penelope* distinctive. Elements such as sound, randomization, links for the reader to interactive with, and ASCII art, all provide a remarkable encounter for the reader. The original publication was also much more interactive, having you type in prompts or hit return to navigate the work rather than just clicking the link. Although the experience would be much different in a printed format, the story still would make a great read. The passages themselves would be much linear, which would take any of the guess work out of trying to figure out if you had encountered all of the different passages. On the other hand, readers would miss out on a large portion of programmed components that together make for a unique and impactful experience. Trying to piece together different nonlinear passages is part of what makes this story fascinating. Readers can try to come to their own conclusions based on the information that they are given. Due to the randomization, every readthrough is going to be different. The difference in the order that passages are presented in can alter the experience of the reader. In this way the reader is given their own unique experience, different from anyone else, that would be impossible to recreate in print. This is the beauty of hypertext fiction. Additionally, *its name was Penelope* was published by Eastgate in 1993. Technology was much different in this year than it is today. Readers and creators have many more options today in terms of their digital fiction.

Overall, I enjoyed this story a lot. There were not too many digital elements to become distracting, but enough to keep my attention and make it more interesting than a simple printed book. I also liked that this story was about the girl's life from childhood to adulthood, and particularly about the struggles that come with the transition from child to adult. Because I am in the middle of that transition myself, it stands out to me in a way it wouldn't if I were still a teenager or child. The story feels very realistic, which is not surprising since it is based partially off the authors own experiences. Obviously, the story takes place before I was born, but a lot of the struggles and themes are still applicable today. As mentioned earlier, comparisons can be drawn between the AIDs epidemic and the COVID pandemic. Additionally, the character dealt

with dire financial struggles that a lot of my peers and I can relate to today. The work makes references to the *Odyssey*, so readers who have experience with that work will be able to read *its name was Penelope* in a way that others would not. Because of themes like this, the story is one that goes beyond its own timeframe and can be applied to a lot of different struggles throughout different decades.



The title page of the story



My name is Brynna Hosszu. I am currently a student at Washington State University Vancouver, set to graduate in spring of 2025. I am a Digital Technology and Culture (DTC) major, specializing in digital arts such as illustration, animation, and multimedia design. I also enjoy traditional mediums like watercolor and gouache. My work is featured in the *Salmon Creek Journal* at Washington State University Vancouver, as well as Clark College's comic anthology, *The Iceberg*. I have also self-published some of my collaborative work. In my spare time I love to draw cats and other critters.

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