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'Borne back ceaselessly into the past': *Glossa*, hypertext and the future of legal education

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Abstract

In this article I shall argue that hypertext in most of its manifestations requires us to adopt reading habits we are unfamiliar with. As I shall show, many of these reading habits have striking parallels with glosses and with forms of reading attention evolved by medieval readers, forms which, since the rise of the printed book in the fifteenth century, have gradually died out. I shall suggest that knowledge of these reading habits could help us not only to understand the advantages and disadvantages of reading hypertext, particularly for academic lawyers and law students, but the means by which electronic text are gradually transforming the way we read text itself. First, we shall examine medieval ways of reading text. Then we shall analyse how one form, the gloss, embodied these reading methods. Next, we shall define hypertext and then compare it to medieval writing and reading. Finally we shall preview the means by which mobile text presentation are changing our ways of reading text.