

Digital Literature: New Vision And Postponed Aesthetics

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Abstract:

Digital literature has emerged in response to life processes governed by development and change. Where cognitive momentum overwhelmed and digitization prevailed,

It was necessary to keep pace with the technological era and the information revolution. Digital literature has become a new and different literature, and has transformed from a readable paper text into an electronic offspring incubated by the World Wide Web, its determinants are alternative media, and its characteristics are interaction, speed, and shortening distances... If so, what is the nature of this literature? What is the new task undertaken by the digital text reader in light of the openness of the text and the rise of the reader's authority with post-modernism trends? If the existence of literature assumes and requires the existence of criticism, is there electronic criticism associated with this type of literature?

If involvement in the worlds of digital literature is inevitable, then to what extent has literature maintained its privacy, literariness, and the aesthetics of its images in light of the multiplicity of media, the temptations of media, and the passion for digital worlds.

Keywords: Multimedia - digital literature - electronic literature - the reader – postmodernism.

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Introduction

Modernity constituted a complex epistemic puzzle in Arab thought, which imposes itself with urgency in order to achieve development and difference, whether in terms of its

terminology or references or at the level of the conditions for its realization in an environment that differs civilizational, culturally and religiously. Modernity is “in some ways a human tendency”¹ and is characterized by comprehensiveness. Because it covers many fields of knowledge. “This is because the term modernity appeared within the field of literary criticism and was then invested and employed in other fields of knowledge, such as sociology, politics, psychoanalysis, linguistics, economics, and theology, to refer to a historical period of time that the West passed through.”²

Although modernity takes on a civilizational dimension that includes all aspects and levels of life, including economic, political, social and technical modernity... it has not been able to solve the dilemmas of self and existence. Rather, it has deepened the estrangement between man and everything associated with him, so it was necessary to overcome it cognitively and critically and search for a differential substitution. It seeks to repair its cracks and prevent it, so came the post-modernism project, which represents “an intellectual movement based on criticism, and even on the rejection of the foundations on which modern Western civilization is based, and it also rejects the postulates on which this civilization is on, or at least sees that time has transcended and surpassed them, and therefore Many post-modernist thinkers consider it a movement higher than capitalism, because the era of modernity for them has already ended, and post-modernism, as a criticism of it, prepares for the establishment of a new society based on new foundations other than those known to modern Western society.”³

Postmodern thought tried to undermine Western centralism and overcome the stereotypes prevailing in various fields, and this was by sowing doubt in everything and calling for the idea of difference and otherness. Critics and philosophers of difference worked to “fragment Western

¹Muhammad Al-Shiker, *Heidegger and the Question of Modernity*, East Africa, Morocco, 1st edition, 2006, p. 124.

²Radwan Jouda Ziadeh, *echo of modernity postmodernism in its next era*, Morocco, 1st edition, 2003, p. 19.

³Ahmed Abdel Halim Attia: *Postmodernism and Deconstruction (Philosophical Essays)*, Publications of Philosophical Papers, Arab Culture House, Cairo, 1st edition, 2008, p. 23.

philosophy and dismantle it into its simplest elements and then the possibility of emerging from it." ⁴ This difference included all levels of philosophical, historical, social, political, and even critical and literary levels. Perhaps the most important difference that has plagued literature is the attempt to break its stereotype that has made it confined to paper and pen. And trying to keep pace with technological changes by entering the digital worlds. In a serious difference to break out of its strict nature, as it has become a major factor in sharpening creative energies and literary writings, because literature has used technology and new methods and invested in all its forms (story, theater, novel). ..).

Thus, literature reached the hands of technology, forming a different writing style based on the presence of a blue screen and a group of technological media, a new literature built on a virtual world. It has been called virtual literature, and some have called it electronic literature or digital literature. Others preferred the name hyperlink, hypertext due to the bifurcation of media and the difference in links. The latter "enabled the individual to provide services quickly and in great abundance. The experience of this different manifestation was reflected in the image of literature and its reading."⁵

First: Digital literature/ different alternative

Modern philosophies seek to investigate the problems of the self and the other, and the relationship that exists between them, because the basis of existence is dialogue and mutual communication, whether directly or through linguistic or non-linguistic means. This is because otherness is "a mirror through which the myth of identity is revealed,"⁶ and therefore all A self needs another, "The other is a secret because it is another," ⁷ in the words of Jacques Derrida. Every self needs to communicate with another in an effort to understand itself and its existence.

⁴Ibid., p. n

⁵Zohour Karam, Digital Literature, Cultural Questions and Conceptual Reflections, Al-Omnia Press, Rabat, 2nd edition, 2013, p. 19.

⁶ Bakhti Ben Odeh, The Ring of Modernity, Difference Publications, 1st edition, 1999, p. 164.

⁷Abdel Salam Bin Abdel Ali, Literature And Metaphysics: Studies In The Works Of Abdel-Fattah Kilito, translated into French by Kamal Toumi, Toubkal Publishing House, Morocco, 1st edition, 2009, p. 63.

Although communication is “the coexistence of people with each other or among their natural surroundings, what makes communication possible are the media and means that humans invent, as embodied in languages or in technologies, that is, in the symbolic products of signs, texts, and standards, or in the material products of goods and Tools and channels”,⁸ the best means for this communication is through text and through the mediation of language, as it serves as a link between the self and the other. “There is no communication without difference, and the difference is attributed to the language system itself, as it is a system based on a dual structure, including The duality of “I” and “You”. The pronoun “I” does not exist without the pronoun “You”, which differs from it. It is this dualistic structure that explodes communication (...) There is no place for communication outside of discourse, and there is no discourse without a ground of difference (...) and the self does not exist outside the field of communication.”⁹

However, a clear examination of the reality of this communication shows the transformation and development that took place at the level of text and writing. “This is because every text has specifications required by the historical moment - with all its cognitive, cultural, artistic and aesthetic loads - that surrounded it. It is natural and certain, then, that we live... Today is a new era with all its complex cognitive and cultural loads, the era of Technological techniques, the distinctive specifications of the product of the modern era of infomedia, whose incubator is interactive media and computer technologies.”¹⁰

The beginning, then, was with the oral stage, which considered “language to be an oral phenomenon made of functional phonetic units, that is more closely linked to the world of

⁸ Ali Harb, *The talk of endings, the conquests of globalization and the dilemmas of identity*, Arab Cultural Center, Morocco, 1st edition, 2000, p. 183.

⁹ Ali Harb, *The World and its Dilemmas, The Logic of Conflict and the Language of Circulation*, Arab Cultural Center, Morocco, 1st edition, 2002, p. 118.

¹⁰ Iyad Ibrahim Malih Al-Bawi, Hafez Muhammad Abbas Al-Shammari, *Digital Interactive Literature, Birth and Change of the Medium*, Academic Book Center, 1st edition, 2011, p. 09.

sound.”¹¹ At this stage, attention is paid to linguistic and non-linguistic aspects, and the focus is on memorization and memory, because it is “characterized by vitality and the possibility of resorting to extra-linguistic means for influence, such as vocal coloring through stress and intonation, lengthening and shortening speech, and the movements of the face, hands, and eyes that accompany speech, all of which are speech acts that have a decisive role in determining the spoken and heard meaning.”¹² This is the first phase of communication that embodied the culture of oral communication. In the absence of another communicative alternative, and in this regard, Walter J. Ong expresses it by saying: “The orality of a culture that has never been touched by any knowledge of writing or printing (...) is primary in contrast to the secondary orality that characterizes today’s high-tech cultures,”¹³ and this stage it relied primarily on listening, transmission, narration, and repetition, as “oral culture is characterized by its storage of knowledge by repetition, in a continuous manner, so oral societies needed to employ great energy in saying what knowledge they had painstakingly acquired over the generations and in repeating it.”¹⁴ Perhaps the best example of this is the ancient Greek epics and ancient Arabic literature, which we have come across orally, narrated and repeated.

As for the second stage, it was associated with writing down, where communication became dependent on writing. It was initially characterized in primitive inscriptions and engraved drawings, and later developed into a type of planning. Walter J. Ong talks about it, saying: “It was a very late development in human history, The human race has been on Earth for approximately 50,000 years, but the first true calligraphy or writing that we know of developed among the Sumerians in Mesopotamia, and this did not happen until about 2500 BC, and human beings before that, countless thousands of years, were drawing pictures.”¹⁵ This stage was characterized by two distinct phases, the first was associated with engraving and

¹¹Walter J. Ong, *Oral and Written*, translated by Hassan al-Banna Izz al-Din, The World of Knowledge, No. 182, Kuwait, year 1994, p. 55.

¹²Nabil Ali, *Arabs and the Information Age*, World of Knowledge Series, Kuwait, April 1994, p. 277.

¹³Nabil Ali, *Arabs and the Information Age*, p. 47.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 103-104.

¹⁵Walter J. Ong, *Oral and Written*, translated by Hassan al-Banna Izz al-Din, pp. 135-136.

Primitive writing on the walls of caves and grottoes then evolved into writing on paper." Writing that showed the possibilities of display on paper emerged, as we find in a poem consisting of a large word (Lixo) in which its letters are formed from words in columns: single, double, or triple, exploiting fullness and emptiness on Paper," ¹⁶as this type of writing relied on writing texts on paper, using a set of grammatical, morphological, and aesthetic rules and regulations. Before this stage became more developed with the advent of printing.

Because evolution is one of the laws of life. We have become "living unparalleled revolutionary transformations, which is the beginning of entry into artificial life represented by information banks, automatic memories, electronic brains and digital networks, which has made some talk about the birth of a new human being, where things and beings are something that can be transformed into a digital structure. "¹⁷

A type of writing emerged that uses digitalization and technology as an alternative and an actual mediator in achieving the communication process. The so-called electronic, digital, hyperlink, or hypertext also appeared, as a text that exploits technologies, informatics, and media. In its early stages, this writing relied on the use of the computer as an effective mediator. It was able to infiltrate all the amenities of life before it was transcended to more modern media and the highest technology. "Electronic writing and digital writing were used in the same sense. It refers to everything that we can write on the computer, or directly on the web page, or it is presented in a way that suits its nature on another device, such as audio and video materials. Perhaps the weakness of the creative writing of Arab writers themselves on the Internet is due to the inability of most of them to use computers for the purpose of publishing. "¹⁸

Thus, a new literature was formed that allows writers to exist and emerge through an electronic medium, facilitates the tasks of publishing, reading, and circulating the book, and opens up new possibilities for the reader to communicate with the writer away from the limitations of pen and paper, as he "uses the

¹⁶Ibrahim Ahmed Melhem, Digital and the Transformations of Writing, Modern World of Books, 1st edition, 2015, p. 27.

¹⁷ Ali Harb, The talk of endings, p. 138.

¹⁸Ibrahim Ahmed Melhem, Digital and Writing Transformations, p. 30.

techniques provided by information technology and electronic computer software to formulate his external and internal structure. Which can only be displayed through electronic interactive media such as CD-ROM, electronic computer, or the Internet. ”¹⁹ Some have chosen to define it as “every text that is published electronically, whether on the Internet, on CDs, in an electronic book, e-mail, etc., based on the theory of communication in its analysis and on the idea of bifurcation in its structures.”²⁰

In fact, this type of writing is a clear expression of the necessity of development and transcendence called for by postmodernism within the framework of openness and cognitive transformation of literature and the intersection of cognitive and literary genres.

This literary form emerged in the 1980s at the hands of a group of American academics, under many different names, including digital, hyperlink, hypertext, interactive... “Father Tibor is considered the first to produce a digital text in the true sense of digital literature. He participated in the Poliphonic9 Festival. In 1985, his poem was displayed on ten screens”²¹, while the first interactive narrative text in the United States of America dates back to “Michael Joyce in the same year in which the first digital poem appeared, 1985. The creator programmed his narrative text (The Afternoon Story) according to an automated program called In the narrative space.”²²

The concept of digitizing literature was simple and uncomplicated: the digitization of everything written, meaning “the possibility of converting all types of information into digital equivalents. The letters of the alphabet with which words and texts are formulated are expressed in digital codes that correspond to these letters number by letter, and shapes and images are scanned electronically.” To turn into a huge group of successive, compact dots, each of these dots can be

¹⁹Iyad Ibrahim Malih Al-Bawi, Hafez Muhammad Abbas Al-Shammari, *Digital Interactive Literature, Birth and the Change of the Medium*, p. 19.

²⁰Ibid., p. n.

²¹Jamil Hamdawi: *Digital Literature between Theory and Practice, Towards the Media Approach*, (Part 1), Al-Muthaqaf Library, Morocco, 2016, p. 94, at the link: almothaqaf.com

²²Ibid., p. 95.

represented digitally, whether in terms of its position, color, or degree of this color."²³

Returning to the beginnings, we will find that Theodor Nelson preferred the term hypertext and defined it as "a new form of non-syllabic writing on the computer, which allows access to its textual units in an interactive manner, as its articulations can organize the text in the form of a network of interconnected sections, and through this foundational conception. "Eastgate" researchers began their attempts to build a theory of hypertext, by starting from the perceptions of the post-modern era and post-structuralist approaches to the text. "²⁴

Also, in the early nineties of the last century, Bob Stein unleashed the electronic book to solve the problems surrounding the paper book, and since then the names have changed, and in order to separate them, I will classify the "book" that is described as electronic into two parts, the first is the "electronic book" and Abbreviated to E-book, it is a paper book that has been converted using a scanner into sequential digital images so that they can be browsed (...) and a multimedia book, the production of which depends on technical media that help present or clarify information, such as video, audio, or images...²⁵

On the other hand, the Frenchman Serge Bouchardon, who is one of those working on the theory of what he calls the interactive narrative, makes the hypertext a component of the components included in the interactive literary narrative, in addition to other components such as the collective interactive texts written by many individuals. the same time".²⁶

While Luc Glaeser defines the interactive poem as "the poem that cannot be presented on paper," ²⁷he raises the issue of the

²³Nabil Ali: Arab Culture and the Information Age, p. 77.

²⁴Abdul Qader Fahim Shibani, The Semiotics of Hypertext, Narratives of Interconnected Architecture, Towards a Theory of the Digital Novel, The Modern World of Books, Jordan, 1st edition, 2014, p. 02.

²⁵Ibrahim Ahmed Melhem, Digital and Writing Transformations, p. 47.

²⁶Zohour Karam, Digital Literature, Cultural Questions and Conceptual Reflections, p. 56.

²⁷Iyad Ibrahim Malih Al-Bawi, Hafez Muhammad Abbas Al-Shammari, Digital Interactive Literature, Birth and the Change of the Medium, p. 19.

boundaries between a written paper text and a virtual electronic text that requires the presence of a computer or blue screen to appear before the reader.

It also requires a set of techniques, information, and hyperlinks that make it a hypertext par excellence. The latter is defined by Le Brave as “a system that allows the management of a group of information, enabling us to access it in a non-sectional manner, as this system is based on a network of nodes and logical links which brings together the total number of nodes.”

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Thus, the hypertext found great resonance with post-modern and post-structuralist critics within the framework of the multiplicity of voices, the openness of texts, the freedom of the reader, and other claims of liberation and literary emancipation that broke the pattern of traditional writing that does not know its way to the reader, except... Through paper drawing and printing, while there was an urgent necessity for the birth of a new writing, which is an electronic birth that foretells a new era, “the era of advanced optics from the frameworks of the pen to the frameworks of electronics. Literary literature has become betting on new scopes of representation of meaning that can be sought in modern writing media.”²⁹

Second: The interactive reader /The different creator

hyper/digital text uses the electronic medium and the information space to form a different text that adopts images and digitalization as an alternative to style, language, and words, and replaces paper with Web pages and electronic links. Hence, another problem arises regarding the recipient of these interactive texts, which requires a second link, which is (the reader/creator) interacting with the text. It is a new birth for an electronic reader who has moved thousands of years away from the reader of Al-Jahiz and Al-Mutanabbi, to form for himself a new orbit and a broader horizon that believes in the intersection of literary genres and their intellectual succession.

²⁸Abdul Qadir Fahim Shibani, *The Semiotics of Hypertext*, p. 69, quoted from:

Le Brave, J,L, *Hypertext, written memories*, Genesis, N 5, 1994.

²⁹Abdul Qadir Fahim Shibani, *The Semiotics of Hypertext*, p. 08.

He is a “reader armed with a new vision,”³⁰ different from the reader in light of contextual and stylistic approaches. He is no longer a passive, consuming reader who is satisfied with observing and counting ideas, nor a reader linked to some external circumstances and references that have contributed in some way to giving it a specific meaning. Rather, he has become a different reader and bearer of a new vision.

Based on this new situation, the reader has occupied an important position and a greater responsibility, which is to achieve interactivity, which is “based on the recipient’s active participation with the links and electronic nodes incubating a programmatic model in which the creator has deposited the juice of his literary and artistic effort.” Thus, the electronic text not only creates a different text, but a different reader, who decodes the text and interacts with its links. “He is no longer a reader in the traditional sense of the word, but rather he has become a writer-reader, that is, someone who reads in order to write and rewrites what he reads in order to reread himself in An endless creative process because the “author” has delegated part of his creative ability to him thanks to the computer.”³¹

This is why critics prefer the term interactive writing, because of the interactive role that the reader plays in reading, interacting, and interpreting. “Interactivity does not happen simply because the reader responds to certain reading paths, but through paths and responses to computer requirements. He can make textual changes and can modify the structure and content of texts.”³² From here, the role of the reader in deconstructing the text, analyzing it, reading it, interpreting it, and reassembling it in a different way becomes clearly evident, highlighting his involvement in writing the text so that the reader becomes a second creator of the text. Hence, it is inevitable to note that “we are faced with the reader who not only achieves its meaning and interpretation, but also rewrites it through The way of recalling what is absent in it and filling in

³⁰ Abdullah Ibrahim: Western centralism (the problem of formation and self-centeredness), Arab Cultural Center, Morocco, 1st edition, 2005, p. 319.

³¹ Alan Fellman, Literature and Digitalism, from Electronic Poetry to Interactive Novels, Trans.: Muhammad Salim, Alamat Magazine, No. 38, 2012, p. 91.

³² Abdul Qader Fahim Shibani, The Semiotics of Hypertext, p. 63.

its blanks,”³³ which requires “acknowledging the role of the recipient in maintaining the text or directing its movement or criticizing it, and these aspects depend on the mechanism that the text producer applied so that the reader interacts.”³⁴

This style of writing, which relies mainly on modern techniques and technologies, only appears and is completed through the interaction of readers. “If rewriting is the act of reviewing a text in order to modify it, either by replacing words, inserting sentence segments, or modifying the rules of previous writing down to The will of the reader, and in response to his freedom of action, becomes an integral and perhaps essential aspect of reading and writing. The reader can obtain a certain independence for creativity, and for this, it is sufficient for the writer to accept delegating part of his creative authority to the final text. ”³⁵ This is why we emphasize the effectiveness of digital text in understanding and perceiving the world better, as it is a reflecting mirror of thought and existence, and on this basis, “what is happening in the digital imaginative field is not a rupture as much as it is an expression of a change in the question of literature from its direct producer, the author/writer, to the reader.”³⁶

In order for the electronic newborn “interactive text” to maintain its life cycle, the author seeks to draw a road map for the reader that defines his tasks and controls the mechanisms for accessing the text, which is as follows: “The first is the written text. The writer may begin by narrating the events of the story, then stop as it grows, to make The recipient writes the solution, and may start from another place, leaving him the freedom to write. Here, we find different writings, all of which contributed to building the text until the event in which the name of the original writer or the writer who gave the signal to start writing is absent.”³⁷

Here the author turns into a mere passer-by, lacking the authority to own his text and the rights to publish it, as if the

³³ Abdul Aziz Hamouda, *Concave Mirrors*, (Arab Critical Theory), World of Knowledge, Kuwait, 2001, p. 152.

³⁴ Ibrahim Ahmed Melhem, *Digital and Writing Transformations*, p. 31.

³⁵ Alan Fellman, *Literature and Digitalism from Electronic Poetry to Interactive Novels*, p. 89.

³⁶ Zohour Karam, *Digital Literature, Cultural Questions and Conceptual Reflections*, p. 27.

³⁷ Ibrahim Ahmed Melhem, *Digital and Writing Transformations*, p. 31.

legitimacy and freedom of the author were conditional and limited to the reader's freedom to read, review, and edit. On the other hand, the second mechanism emerges, where "the role of the recipient is limited to choosing the movement of the text by clicking on the hypertext, and the creator may add to the text a space in which to write his opinion about what he read, and the reader may do nothing but watch, then write a comment if he wishes to do so as We find it in poetic works presented on video on YouTube."³⁸

The reader's interactivity is reflected in the roles played by the reader of the interactive novel, as it is represented in a number of functions: "interpretation, which is an inherent part of every reading, and navigation, that is, for the recipient to effectively navigate the Internet through branching textual paths and then formation, It is for the recipient to work to reconstruct the text within certain limits, and writing is for the recipient to allow himself to participate in writing the text, and perhaps this function is rare, few, and limited to the limits of certain texts."³⁹

Conclusion

In addition to the above, interactive writing constitutes the foundation of a new phase in literature, seeking to keep pace with technological development and consolidate the principles of post-modern thought by raising the authority of the reader and breaking out of the fatal stereotype imposed by the paper book.

This reader has the legitimacy to enter the digital text from any angle he wishes, to question, dialogue, interrogate and explore the text with authorization from the writer and media and technical facilitation. Therefore, he must be a different reader who rewrites the interactive text in an aesthetic manner.

From this standpoint, it must be said that the activation of technological media and the use of computers, media, and the Internet must not negate the aesthetics of creative writing and consideration of public taste, which go beyond the boundaries of virtual worlds to be embodied in every creative work.

The written text remains its value and status despite the development of technological media, as it gives it technology,

³⁸Ibid., p. n.

³⁹Ibrahim Ahmed Melhem, *Digital and Writing Transformations*, 31.

but the literary and aesthetic qualities can only be created by the creative writer, and only an experienced reader can devote them to it.

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