

Think India (Quarterly Journal)

ISSN: 0971-1260 Vol-22, Special Issue-07

Two-Day National seminar on

"Artificial Intelligence, Multimedia and ICT in Teaching,
Learning and Acquisition"

sponsored by

Indian Council of Social Science Research, New Delhi
on 23rd and 24th September 2019 at Department of English,
SRI S. Ramasamy Naidu Memorial College, Sattur, Tamilnadu, India



Computers And Composition: Literature In The Digital Age

Dr. P. Prasanna Devi M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D.

Assistant Professor of English,

The Standard Fireworks Rajaratnam

College for Women, Sivakasi.

Abstract

In the age of web, there is a considerable shift in the way of reading literature with the advent of web based applications on and offline and electronic devices such as kindle. To complement or to compete with electronic reading or e-reading, there has also been a mushrooming of various genres or types of electronic compositions or creations. The younger generation's love for technology mingled with their endowment for creativity has resulted with the production of electronic literature. Being part of Digital Humanities, e-literature has lots of scope for the literary creators and the commoners to produce born digital literary works. The creative possibilities in digital form challenges the traditional means of creative writing especially paper-and-ink books that have rich literary qualities. Though the pleasure, the single-mindedness and the imaginative independence the books in print offer can never be replaced, e-literature has its own positivity and drawbacks. The article intends to analyse the culture of reading and writing in the age of twitter, blogs and e-books and to explore how digital media has altered the form of literature in the present scenario.

Keywords: *e-literature, digital poetry, fan fiction, Alt Lit, born digital.*

'Digital India' has been a catchy term since 2015 as the Indian government's campaign with the same name was launched to make all sorts of government services available to all the Indians electronically. When a country can be empowered with technology, the debate arises as to why the field of literature can't? In this Digital Age, there is an explosion of interest in e-reading and e-book devices like the Kindle, iPod and Nook; younger generation prefer electronic literature rather than the print form. The article intends to analyse the culture of reading and writing in the age of internet and to explore how digital media has altered the form of literature in the present scenario.

Scholarly work in all academic fields such as science, engineering, medicine is increasingly being done digitally and the field of humanities is no exemption. To begin with, the field of Digital Humanities is broadly humanities based and includes scholars in history, literary studies, musicology, performance studies, media studies etc. who can benefit from bringing computing technologies to bear on traditional humanities materials. In 2001, the term was known as 'humanities computing' that focus on computing methods applicable to textual materials. The sphere includes study, research, teaching and innovation concerned with the intersection of computing and the various

Article Info:

Think India (Quarterly Journal)

ISSN: 0971-1260 Vol-22, Special Issue-07

Two-Day National seminar on

"Artificial Intelligence, Multimedia and ICT in Teaching,
Learning and Acquisition"

sponsored by

Indian Council of Social Science Research, New Delhi

on 23rd and 24th September 2019 at Department of English,

SRI S. Ramasamy Naidu Memorial College, Sattur, Tamilnadu, India



disciplines of humanities. It involves investigation, analysis, synthesis and presentation of information in electronic form.

Digital Humanities has gained prominence because of the widespread use of social media which led to the boom of electronic literature. Electronic literature is a branch of the main tree of literature. It may be defined as works created exclusively on and for the digital devices such as computers, laptops, tablets and smart phones. These writings cannot be printed at all because the elements used in them can never be carried over to print. Davin Heckman and James O'Sullivan define the term 'Electronic Literature' as "a construction whose literary aesthetics emerge from computation", "work that could only exist in the space for which it was developed/ written/ coded - the digital space" (qtd. in wikidpedia.org). The official website of the Electronic Literature Organization defines electronic literature as 'born-digital literary art' consisting of works such as e-books, hypertext, animated poetry, flash poems, novels that take the form of e-mails, SMS messages or blogs, poems and stories generated interactively, collaborative writing projects etc. Fan fiction, digital poetry and Alternative Literature may also be included in the list. The website has so far produced three volumes of Electronic Literature Collections.

A born digital work hence remains digital at every step - production, transmission and consumption. Roland Barthes in 1967 wrote the essay titled "The Death of the Author" which argues against the consideration of the intention and biographical context of the author while interpreting a literary text; hence maintained that the writing and the writer are unrelated. The literary revolution of the internet age has seen the "living death of the Digital author" (Hammond 139). For the unchecked mushrooming of writing such as Fan fiction and Alternative writing has seen many amateur writers posting their works based on an original literary text.

The term 'Fan fiction' is self-explanatory, as it is fiction created by the fans of a particular work. The term "Fan fiction" also abbreviated as 'fanfic' came into use in the 20th century. It can range from a work of a few sentences to an entire novel. The fans-cum-writers may create their works by manipulating, adding or deleting the original text's characters, plot or setting. Fan fiction is a derivative work and therefore may constitute a copyright violation. It is not unoriginal but anti-original. Piptr Kowalczyk in his article "15 most fanfiction websites to explore" enlists the number of stories written by the fans as follows: "The most popular sections on Fan Fiction are (the number of stories at the time of writing this post):

- Harry Potter Books (Books) – over 650,000 stories
- Naruto (Anime/Manga) – over 300,000 stories
- Twilight (Books) – over 200,000 stories" (ebookfriendly.com).

Though fan fiction have from time to time faced legal issues, prominent writers such as J.K. Rowling, author of *Harry Potter* series and Stephenie Meyer, author of *Twilight* series have supported fan fiction. In fact, the *Fifty Shades* trilogy was developed originally from *Twilight* fan fiction. To Goatly and Hiradhar, "The novel is derivative of the 60,000 existing *Twilight* fan fiction productions that were circulating before E.L. James wrote the book. It is in a sense a collective creation" (295-96). They mention that the other sub-genres of fan fiction include cross-over or mash fiction "where characters

Think India (Quarterly Journal)

ISSN: 0971-1260 Vol-22, Special Issue-07

Two-Day National seminar on

"Artificial Intelligence, Multimedia and ICT in Teaching,
Learning and Acquisition"

sponsored by

Indian Council of Social Science Research, New Delhi

on 23rd and 24th September 2019 at Department of English,

SRI S. Ramasamy Naidu Memorial College, Sattur, Tamilnadu, India



from different works or genres appear in the same text" (295) for which they quote the example of *Abraham Lincoln Vampire Hunter*.

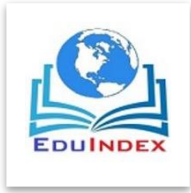
Alternate Universe (AU) fiction seems to dominate fan fiction which deals with imaginary situations and familiar fictional characters. For example, *Twilight* based AU follows Bella on Titanic and Edward and Bella meeting in kindergarten etc. The website fanfiction.net supports the fans to post their writing. Alternative Literature or Alt Lit also dismisses the conventional notion of authorship for it is heavily influenced by internet culture and anonymous self-publishing.

SMS novel or cell phone novel or mobile phone novel originated in China. They are primarily written by young women. Chapters usually consist of about 70-140 words as per the character limitations in text messages. They are mostly based on the theme of love and relationship. Webfiction is another literary genre available only on the internet. These webserials are published in websites or blogs chapter by chapter. The other name of it is 'Interactive Fiction' which is similar to fan fiction which allows the readers to become writers. 'Web novel' or 'Wovel' as Underland Press, a publishing company, named so is written by the author as per the majority of the vote cast by the readers online. The plot of the novel and the fate of the characters are based on the readers' vote and so the story is not predetermined by the writer. Kealan Patrick Burke's *The Living* is an example of wovel. *Pottermore* is J. K. Rowling's extended version of the series *Harry Potter*. This offers the readers a different experience into the world of Harry Potter.

Hypertext fiction and gamebooks are also some of the recent developments of literature in the digital age. Hypertext fiction is characterised by the use of hypertext links (references to other data by clicking or tapping them) so that the reader can read from the pool of related stories. Internal references lead to different plots of the central story. *Choose Your Own Adventure* is a popular series of children's gamebooks where the stories are written from second person narrative and the reader assumes the role of the protagonist and makes the choices that determine the action and the outcome of the plot. The stories are designed in such a way that after reading the first few pages, the reader faces a few options that lead to several options which ultimately lead to one of the endings. The success of the series *Choose Your Own Adventure* led to similar series.

There are many types of 'digital poetry' such as hypertext, kinetic poetry, computer generated animation, digital visual poetry, interactive poetry, code poetry, holographic poetry (holopoetry), experimental video poetry, and poetry that take advantage of the programmable nature of the computer to create works that are interactive and collaborative. Such poetic works make use of different media such as text, animation, sound, images etc.

The creative possibilities in digital form challenge the traditional norms of creative writing especially paper-and-ink books that have rich literary qualities. When we think of literature, we naturally think of printed books. This conventional idea, though old-fashioned, is not completely out-dated. The tactile companionship of a book gives one, the lifelong memory of reading it. Though the pleasure, the single-mindedness and the imaginative independence the books in print offer can never be replaced, e-literature has its own positivity too. Books will surely be one of the many ways we enjoy literature. At the same time, e-literature is the definite destiny of future. It is an unpleasant fact that many people including the adults do not just have the habit of reading other than



Think India (Quarterly Journal)

ISSN: 0971-1260 Vol-22, Special Issue-07

Two-Day National seminar on "Artificial Intelligence, Multimedia and ICT in Teaching, Learning and Acquisition"

sponsored by

Indian Council of Social Science Research, New Delhi
on 23rd and 24th September 2019 at Department of English,
SRI S. Ramasamy Naidu Memorial College, Sattur, Tamilnadu, India



the newspaper; but vast reading among the people is made possible because of internet. Though many writers have abhorred the idea of Alt Lit and Wovel, these forms are just other sub-genres of literature.

While many critics feel that literature in the digital age with its poor literary quality would hasten the decline of literature, there are some who take the spirit of creativity of the internet generation positively. Steve Roggenbuck, a leading figure in Alt Lit in his "Doctrine on 'Internet Poetry'" declares: "print is dead: publishers are dead: academia is dead.... Long live blogs: long live free literature: long live public domain and creative commons: long live self-publishing: long live torrents...long live the internet" (qtd. in Hammond 143). In spite of criticisms like reading habit has shrunken, the authenticity of the author has disappeared and lack of editorial control, the good thing about writing in the age of internet is that readers need not be merely passive and they can become active creators too. As evolution and innovation are what that have lead humans from caves to skyscrapers, the way of reading and writing may change but they would definitely be here as humans' existence.

As per the saying, 'Swim with the tide', the younger generation's preference for creation in digital mode in the current style should be encouraged. Since writing, especially literary writing is an expression of self and reflection of the society, there needn't be any curbing of the creativity. The way of expression of oneself is one's happiness and it is up to the receivers to decide what to accept and what not. The presence of negative criticism against e-literature is surely expected and it would also surely nurture the creativity instead of curtailing it.

References

- [1] Goatly, Andrew and Preet Hiradhar. *Critical Reading and Writing in the Digital Age: An Introductory Coursebook*. Routledge, New York. (2016)
- [2] Hammond: Adam. *Literature in the Digital Age: An Introduction*. Cambridge University Press, New York. (2016)
- [3] <https://ebookfriendly.com/fan-fiction-websites/>
- [4] <https://eliterature.org/>
- [5] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Electronic_literature#cite_note-1
- [6] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fan_fiction
- [7] <https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/cultures/alt-lit>
- [8] <https://www.fanfiction.net/>
- [9] <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/features/books-special-can-intelligent-literature-survive-in-the-digital-age-926545.html>