

**Towards Digital Literature: A New Concept and Another Classification – A New Section and a Different Understanding.**

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**Abstract:**

With the dawn of the third millennium, the world, and the literary scene in particular, witnessed unprecedented advancements in media and communication technologies. This era relied on information mechanisms to globalize and digitize texts, resulting in the birth of a new genre known as digital literature. Therefore, this study aims to shed light on digital literature, a genre whose definition has been subject to differing opinions and has been mislabeled. This study seeks to clarify the nature of this genre and dispel the confusion surrounding it.

**Keywords:**Digital literature; hypertext; interaction; imaginary space; navigation

**Introduction:**

Technology, with its various media, has become a necessity of life and an undeniable reality in the field of literary creativity. The fusion of literary texts with digital media has produced a new genre known as digital literature. What is this new type of literature, and what are its characteristics?

**Digital Literature (Conceptual Overview):**

Digital literature is a new genre that has emerged from the developments witnessed in the literary scene within the field of technology. The binary (0/1) has given literature the characteristic of digitization. Perhaps the many nicknames associated with this genre are, in reality, due to the connection between literary texts and technological devices, systems, and various media.

**According to scholars in this field, digitization is the process of converting visual knowledge into digital format using the BINER system.**

If “digitization is the technical means of transforming information, allowing a phenomenon perceived analogically (sound, color, light perceived by humans continuously and comprehensively) to be perceived digitally, based on a binary system of 0s and 1s, and to integrate the values of analog signals into the computer, signals containing values independent of each other, i.e., discontinuous (separate), are used. Digitization does not only mean possessing and managing electronic documents, but also converting paper images or any traditional media into electronic formats” (Al-Hamza, 2010, p. 104).

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Digitization is not limited to paper documents and printed information, but extends to sound recordings, microfilm, and microfiche. Sounds, regardless of their format, can be digitized using specialized technical media (Al-Hamza, 2010, p. 73).

There are two methods of digitization: the image method and the text method. Below we will trace the various definitions of pioneering critics and writers in this field:

Bobby Rapid (a pioneer of interactive fiction in the West) defines digital literature as that which employs modern technological tools, particularly those offered by **hypertext** systems, to create a new genre that blends the literary and the electronic. This type of literature can only be presented through the blue screen, which allows the reader to engage in interactive reading, thus expanding its reach beyond that of a spoken text (Al-Buraiki, 2006, p. 49).

Julia Kristeva, on the other hand, views digital text as a translingual device that redistributes the system of language by linking it to speech, with the aim of direct communication (Ali Najm, 2010, p. 40). Lou Glazer, in his discussion of interactive poetry, defines digital literature as that which cannot be presented in any form on paper (Al-Bahrani, 2009, p. 26).

**George Landaw** defines it as: “a text composed of blocks of texts and electronic links connecting them” (Yaktin, 2008, p. 13). Thus, he touches upon an important aspect of digital text: its branching and interconnected nature.

Elsewhere, Said Yaktin defines digital literature, within the broader concept of interactive creativity, as: “the sum of creative works (literature being among the most prominent) that arose with the use of computers, did not exist before, or evolved from older forms, but took on new forms in production and reception with the advent of computers” (Yaktin, 2005, p. 301). Therefore, in his view, digital literature is nothing more than a fusion of literature and technological media. Fatima Al-Buraiki sees digital literature as an artistic tableau, stating that it is: “a mosaic that brings together texts in all their forms—written, spoken, and visual—in both their static and dynamic states. This electronic mosaic is characterized by its ability to establish relationships of overlap and interweaving between the various texts it contains, with all their diversity and multiplicity, in addition to its flexibility in the transition between textual and non-textual materials” (Al-Buraiki, 2006, p. 183).

Thus, digital literature gives its texts an interactive, interconnected, and interwoven dimension, as texts become capable of containing other texts, whether spoken or written, static or dynamic, which can be accessed independently or embedded within the spoken text. Fatima Al-Buraiki also acknowledges in another place the mercurial nature of the term and its adoption of the electronic medium, as literature cannot be considered digital unless the writer and the recipient together are able to use computer media and interactive digital writing mechanisms. She says: “Interactive literature is a broad term, which, as we have seen, includes a number of literary genres that differ from each other completely, and they hardly agree except in that they do not appear to their recipient except electronically. This necessarily means that their producer does not produce them except electronically as well, which requires the creator to become proficient in using the computer, understanding its language and programs, and everything related to it, so that he can formulate his creativity without feeling psychological barriers, at least, between him and the medium through which he transmits his creativity to the recipient, even if he uses the most skilled computer specialists to do that on his behalf” (Al-Buraiki, 2018). Thus, it denounces the necessity for

both the recipient and especially the author to be proficient in electronic and computer media. Mr. Najm adds a third pillar upon which digital literary texts depend, namely the recipient's ability to interact with the text displayed on their computer screen. He states that: "Literature that employs the data of modern technology, particularly the data offered by the **hypertext** system, presents a new literary genre that combines the literary and the electronic, i.e., through the blue screen. This type of literary writing acquires its interactive character based on the space it grants to the recipient, which must equal, and perhaps even exceed, the space of the original creator of the text. This means the recipient's ability to interact with the text in any possible way" (Mr. Najm, 2018).

Thus, Mr. Najm also condemns the necessity for both the recipient and the creator to have access to the electronic medium. Through this medium, the recipient now has a space equal to or sometimes greater than that of the original creator, and this is an addition

New elements have emerged in literature that were not available with print literature, as if digital literature has placed almost equal importance on the reader as it has on the digital medium itself.

Elsewhere, critic Al-Eid Jalouli takes a different approach. He argues that digital literature is not simply a fusion of literature and technology, or merely the presentation of texts through a screen, as other critics have suggested. He emphasizes that digital literary texts possess distinct characteristics and reading experiences that differ from traditional print literature. In his view, digital literature cannot be presented in print in any form due to the media it employs. He states: "Interactive literature is a literary genre with its own writing and reading characteristics, and its own literary forms. It is a different kind of literature in its production and presentation from traditional literature, and it would not have emerged were it not for the developments in communication technologies, especially computers. In this type of literature, the author does not rely solely on language but strives to present it through expressive media such as sound, images, movement, and others" (Jalouli, March 2011, p. 237).

As for Jamil Hamdawi, he gives digital literature a limit that combines what is literary and what is mathematical and computational, since he sees that digitization is a mathematical and numerical term that has come together with literature. Thus, we find that digital literature combines what is mathematical and numerical with what is aesthetic and poetic. He says: "Digital literature is that literature which studies literature in terms of digitization, computation, and information, by combining the literary and media data, and emphasizing the two functions: aesthetic and digital, and in light of an interactive, relational, and media approach [Médiologique]" (Hamdawi, 2016, p. 23). This definition, perhaps, focuses on the medium that occupies the largest space, making it more of a mathematical than a literary definition. It states: "Digital literature is mathematical, logarithmic, and interactive literature, composed of double digits and mathematical numbers, or it is literature that consists of mathematical worlds oscillating between two numbers, 0 and 1. Hence, digital worlds cannot be understood except through these mathematical numbers" (Hamdawi, 2016, p. 24). He also emphasized the necessity for the author to possess computer programming skills, as the author is aware of the process being undertaken; otherwise, a specialist in computing and logarithms should assist him.

Within the same framework, we find Abdel Nour Idris, in his discussion of digital literature, giving it another dimension, focusing on the interactive process between the recipient and the text presented through the screen. He argues that "...the digital text, while disrupting literary theory, attributes its literary efficacy to the interactive recipient (consumer-producer) who shifts from the center to the margins, engaging with the center only to weaken its authority and diminish the dominance of its tools" (Idris, 2001, p. 83). However, this view contradicts reality, as the recipient now possesses an authority equal to that of the presenter, and the presented text is, in fact, merely a prelude to a second creative act born after the initial reading of the first text.

In the same vein, and in discussing the alternative concept of digital text, Zahour Karam states that it is "something formed from the materials that constitute its form (language, sound, image, work on documents and files, multimedia, software), within the open boundaries with the reader (personal choices, individual decisions, psychological and mental states, social and cultural behavior...). Therefore, the digital text becomes a fabric of signs that subject it to a fixed and established state, but its textuality is realized through its dynamism and incompleteness. Reading is the horizon for realizing the textuality of the digital text" (Karam, 2009, p. 50).

In her definition of digital literature, Zahour Karam emphasizes the necessity of interaction between the author and the recipient, or more precisely, between the text and the recipient, for the digitalization of the literary text to be achieved. This includes the author's use of technological media, multimedia, software, and related technologies.

### **Digital Literature: Characteristics and Features:**

Just as every genre of literature has characteristics and features that distinguish it from others, digital literature also has its own defining characteristics. Since things are known by their opposites, as the saying goes, we must consider traditional print literature if we want to understand the features of digital literature. Through this comparison, we can conclude the following:

**1. Publishing and its Ease (Al-Buraiki, 2008, p. 43):** We are accustomed to the publication of traditional literature through publishing houses and libraries, passing through printing presses, and finally reaching the reader. However, digital literature does not require all these stages to reach the reader; rather, it goes directly from its producer to its recipient.

Abdel Nour Idris says: "Electronic publishing transcends the constraints of place and time. The writer publishes, the reader receives, and then the text is passed on to a printer, unlike the traditional chain where the product is printed at a printing press and then distributed by a distribution company before finally reaching the reader" (Idris, 2001, p. 92). It is a form of literature that does not face the rejection and censorship that most traditional writings encounter in their early stages. On the contrary, it finds a wide-open space, free from censorship and stifling limitations, which has increased its appeal to creative writers.

### **2. Collective Creativity (The Text for Its Reader):**

Here, it's important to note that digital texts don't require publishing houses to reach the reader. When a reader engages with a digital text, which offers links and interactive features that allow them to reinterpret the text within the confines of their blue screen, they become a

creator parallel to the original author. It can be argued that digital literature doesn't have a single author; rather, all recipients participate in its creation, provided they are compatible with the software on which the text is installed, enabling active reading. Therefore, digital texts transcend the idea of authorial creation, opening up horizons for active and participatory readings—if we may use that term. This is precisely what interactive communication theory suggests: "It emphasizes the vital participation that the recipient must reflect in every communication process that takes place between people" (Belmlih, 2000, p. 52).

Digital literature does not recognize a single creator of the text, thus making the reader the de facto owner of the literary work. This is a result of the merging of literary creativity with technology. It "eliminates the pre-existing boundaries between the elements of the creative process, opens the doors that were closed between them, and makes the creator a reader, and the reader a creator, so that the union of these two elements leads to the creation of a new text, which belongs neither to the creator nor to the reader; it belongs to all the inhabitants of the virtual space" (Al-Buraiki, 2008, p. 51). This was not prevalent in the print era. As **Jay David Bolter** says, "What seems unnatural in the required texts will become natural in the electronic medium" (**Bolter, 2001, p. 143**). Therefore, digitalization has opened up a vast field for reading, which has been met with great enthusiasm. Readers spend more time in the virtual world than in the real world, due to the ease with which they can reshape and alter the text displayed on their blue screen. This is not the case in the print era.

### **3.Navigation:**

This is a crucial element in digital literature, as it is the only way for the text to truly manifest itself. It is a technical necessity for participation and interaction, since the digital text consists of a series of hyperlinks through which the reader navigates. As Pierre (April 2002, p. 47) explains, "The act of reading becomes a complete activity that manifests itself when moving from one node to another," leading the reader to the expected and unexpected elements of the text within the confines of its blue screen, much like hypertext (chat).

Ted Nelson says: "Through the technique of hypertext, I wanted to arrive at writing a paragraph that includes chapters within it, through which the reader can explore additional information that does not appear directly while reading that paragraph" (Alain, N1990, p190). And navigation, as Said Yaqtin saw it, is an element that distinguishes digital literature from others, as it enables the reader to dive into the depths of the text while simultaneously soaring into its space (Yaqtin, 2008, pp. 33, 34). Using iconic media and hyperlinks, as in hypertext (chat), clicking on a highlighted word takes you to the chat screen or text messages...

### **4. Interactivity:**

Interactivity, or interactivity, between the text and the reader, or between the reader, the text, and the medium, is described by Jean Balpe as "the concept of interactivity being the opposite of the concept of automation, since interactivity does not occur simply because the reader responds to specific reading paths. Rather, through these paths and by responding to the computer's requirements, the reader may make textual changes and modify the flow and content of texts" (**Pierre, N1990, p. 12**).

The characteristic of interactivity is very important for achieving communication, and it is also important in digital literature. However, interaction in this type of literature is not the same as that which came before. Iser and Jauss in reception theory, since the latter's goal is to

produce the complete text and not just to read the text and create a subsequent impression of it, he does not acknowledge the existence of previous or parallel texts, that is, he breaks the concept

Intertextuality is entirely present, which is why it doesn't intersect with the familiar printed text. Said Yaqtin says regarding the issue of interaction: "It is the process of exchange or reciprocal response that occurs between the possibilities offered by the information system to the user, and vice versa. This can be demonstrated by the user clicking on an icon, for example, to move to another page.

Furthermore, the computer can prompt the user to do something if they have acted incorrectly, by displaying a message bar that the user must follow to achieve the appropriate service.

There is another, broader meaning of interaction, which is represented in the operations performed by the user as they move between links to construct the text in a way that benefits them. In this way, it transcends the linear reading performed by a reader of a printed book.

Literary works (such as novels) or artistic works (games, dramas) have emerged that are based on the interconnection of their various components, and they are founded on the basis of interaction or interactive reading" (Yaqtin, 2005, p. 259). This leads us to conclude that the recipient is a creator and an active participant in the overall interconnected narrative.

Therefore, as reception theory suggests, the recipient must be granted a space equal to or greater than that of the original creator (Salama, 2018). Thus, each element of the communicative process becomes an interactive element in digital creation. The recipient interacts with the text on one hand, and the text interacts with the technological medium, thus realizing the online or digital text, on the other. Noam Chomsky's theory is modified, as the message becomes the first party, the recipient the second (and the facilitator in the message's emergence), and the sender the final party, the virtual intermediary between the message and the recipient. If the recipient does not flow within the digital text, we cannot speak of interaction, as it is only possible through their participation.

### **5.The Dynamics of Digital Text:**

Digital text has fixed phonemes and motifs like printed text, but in other places it is dynamic, referring us to other branching links. A word in digital text may convey its meaning within its context, and it may also refer to moving images, videos, or sounds (multimedia). This makes the recipient feel that he is inside the text and moves between the corridors of the street and the rooms of the house, and connects with the characters, as in the interconnected narrative (Chat and the Frost). Digital text is alive; we sense its life in its dynamism and the references upon which it is based.

### **6.Non-linearity of digital text:**

Non-linearity is an inherent characteristic of digital text, inseparable from it. The hierarchical structure we are accustomed to in printed text is absent in digital text; its units do not follow a sequential order. Instead, its structure may be hierarchical, astral, or otherwise, due to its branching nature. Herein lies the reader's skill in reshaping the presented units in a way that reflects their own ingenuity. The reader might start from the end and jump through the nodes, building their own network. For example, a reader of a chat text might navigate through the windows that permeate the text, to phone ringtones, and finally to the introduction or conclusion.

### **7.The Labyrinth Text:**

Digital text is unlike any other. It is characterized by its numerous links that lead to further branches, necessitated by the reader's interaction. The labyrinth, with its many knots, draws the reader forward. Just when they become absorbed in the path and think they have reached the end, they are surprised by a new knot that takes them to another path. In other words, they move from one space to another through suggestive generation, in a Hermetic labyrinth fundamentally based on the principle of pleasure (Eco, 2000, p. 123). Labiba Khammar says: "This labyrinth is generated by the interconnected text, which leads the reader to believe they have approached its core or its hidden meaning. This core, along with its potential meanings, then vanishes, and the reader is seized by a feverish tapping, tapping and tapping again, searching for the desired goal that evaporates and slips through their fingers every time they think they have grasped it or are about to touch it" (Khammar, 2014, p. 45). Thus, the reader becomes beautifully bound to the illusion of reaching the core, causing them to dissolve into the text and never emerge lost.

### **8.Connection and Separation:**

Digital text - in its various forms - enables us to connect its branches, and it also enables fragmentation. The reader in interconnected discourse (chat) can collect the dialogue windows and read them, and he can go to the colored words and the bolded clause or the icons and follow the dialogue, without going back to the beginnings and breaks of the discourse, and this will not affect the overall structure.

### **9.Open Endings:**

Digital text is a text without end and without a single beginning. It is a text that allows for interpretation and reshaping, as the reader stands bewildered before several knots, and whichever one to start with is the destination. Thus, the reader chooses one knot only to return to another, traversing countless paths endlessly, until their energy is exhausted and the text comes to an end.

### **10.The Text of Buttons (0/1) and Imaginary Space:**

The technology and media that have become intertwined with literature necessitate the use of buttons (0/1) and imaginary space. A digital text cannot be presented without relying on technology, as it is the fundamental element in its formation. Perhaps this characteristic is what has led writers to shy away from it, imagining that the digital text has lost its cultural, human, and aesthetic dimensions. This claim, while having some merit if the creator is purely technical and has no interest in digital literature other than technology, becomes the opposite if the writer possesses poetic and literary aesthetics and has knowledge and familiarity with the technological media that help him present literature. Therefore, we shouldn't favor one side over the other. Digital literature has combined the two (literature/technology) or (literary text/digitization). So how can we favor paper for fear that literary quality will be lost in the depths of digital space? Is it paper that preserves the literary quality of literature?

The answer is no. There are texts written exclusively on paper that lack literary imagery, while digital texts radiate literary brilliance. The conclusion is that literary beauty doesn't

vanish simply by combining literary text with technology, nor is it inherent in paper and its scent. Rather, it stems from literary sensibility and those skilled in the field. Therefore, we must establish guidelines for digital texts to prevent them from suffering the same fate as Noah's Ark, perhaps by allowing interpretation and analysis to be reserved for the experienced reader.

Other characteristics of digital text have been identified by Philippe Butz (Butz et al., 2016, pp. 31-35), such as algorithms, digital encryption, compatibility, and composite media.

However, these are primarily characteristics concerned with technology rather than with literature integrated with technology.

### **A New Classification and Another Understanding:**

Not every text displayed on a screen can be called a purely digital text. Texts found in our heritage are rich in artistic and cultural aesthetics... and can be displayed on a screen through digital input. Texts can also combine writing with multimedia, meaning they can be presented on paper, such as a large book with accompanying CDs, or a CD. We read the text traditionally, and when we come to the music and videos, we access them on the CD via computer, numbering and arranging them to avoid confusion.

Therefore, not every text containing links and references can be called a digital text. *One Thousand and One Nights*, in particular, stands out for its endless allusions and links, which cause the reader to lose themselves in its labyrinth and navigate its pages. Furthermore, not every digital text employs non-linearity. The printed novel, in its general structure, relies on several forms such as parallelism, a circular timeline, and a fragmented plot, as well as techniques like flashbacks, beginning where the ending is, and shifting the narrative from a linear to a branching form. All of these are, in reality, merely methods of constructing the novel's structure.

So... what is a digital text?

A digital text is a text imposed by technology with all its tools and media. It is a text born to thrive in the sea of digitization, and if it were to leave it, it would perish.

### **Conclusion:**

Thus, texts appearing in foliated, tree-like, and star-shaped formats cannot be considered digital texts; they are originally paper texts that have become digital media inputs.

Furthermore, non-linear texts that arise in complex formats, which do not allow the knowledgeable reader to create their own interpretation and then present it as a parallel text to the original, but rather cause it to become lost in the various paths, are more deserving of this designation than other texts. H elene Godinet Hustache addressed this point, emphasizing the need to distinguish between computerized texts and digital literary texts (H elene, N1998, p. 28).

Therefore, we must reconsider the concept and characteristics of the digital text.

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