



## **Digital Literature: Exploring Literary Value in the Age of Interactivity**

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### **Introduction**

Friedrich Nietzsche said, “Our machines are shaping our thoughts.” He was using the typewriter of the time Malling – Hansen Writing Ball (Kittler 1999, p 249). Digital literature or Electronic Literature is a genre of literature that is created to be read on digital devices. A work of Digital Literature can be defined as "a construction whose literary aesthetics emerge from computation" or "work that could only exist in the space for which it was developed/written/coded—the digital space.(Davin Heckman & James O’Sullivan (2017)

We can observe that we are increasingly creating, sharing, reading, and interacting with content, efficiently surviving in the common space shared by digital media and textuality. Print literature has supported students’ learning for centuries and for people of all age groups in recreational reading; however, with the growth of modern technology, the popularity of digital literature is apparent not only among recreational reading but in education as well (Rettberg,2012).

Digital writing takes advantage of digital technologies like computation, multimodality, animation and 3D modeling, interactivity, networking, and digital culture and is broader than digital literature. Digital literature is artistic writing, according to Dr. Leonardo Flores, President of Digital Literature Organization (2021). Digital literature and technology are intertwined; hence the history and evolution of digital literature is essentially the history of technology. Technology is a part of our culture and not a cause or effect of it ( Slack and Wise 2005).

Digital literature is emerging and evolving in almost all parts of the globe due to the accessibility to computers and the internet. Artists use the technological abilities of computers and the internet to express themselves artistically in their own ways, as the users of electronic devices can find their own paths to create works of art. The outcome is that this genre of literature is representative of unique and innovative developments. There is a large body of digital literature with many aspects and including the perspective of digital humanities.

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## **Defining Digital Literature**

Digital disruption is a phenomenon that has touched all spheres of life. Literature is adorning itself from the specks of digital forces and not shrugging off the digital effects on literary practices. The rapidly accelerating technology is lending itself to newer forms of literary creations with its use. The digital disruption is giving way to the birth of a contemporary literary movement, and there is a new way in which people consume and produce information. Digital literature is changing everything we thought we knew about literature.

Digital Literature refers to a wide range of literary works that utilize the processing capabilities of computers to go beyond simple distribution methods. These works aim to enhance the poetic aspects of the text through various computer-based techniques. Both critics and creators of these innovative forms of literature came together under the label of "electronic literature" and formed the Electronic Literature Organization in 1999. This non-profit organization primarily aims to foster creativity and scholarship in new digital textual genres ( Rettberg 2012).

Electronic Literature Organization's broad and inclusive definition of electronic literature is "works with important literary aspects that take advantage of the capabilities and contexts provided by the stand-alone or networked computer."

## **Review of Literature**

Digital Literature has a little more than three decades of development and is relatively a new area of investigation when we consider it within the historical context of literary works produced for the oral, written, and print mediums. Digital literature is also called Electronic Literature or e lit.

It is published online mostly and the digital literature works are multimodal, highly variable in form and rarely present linear texts so searching for older works is not easy always. It is difficult also because there is no central repository or bibliography of digital literature.

Digital literature is not just a "thing" or a "medium" or even a body of "works" in various "genres." It is not poetry, fiction, hypertext, gaming, code work, or some new admixture of all these practices. It is, arguably, an emerging cultural form, as much a collective creation of new terms, keywords, genres, structures, and institutions as it is the production of new literary objects.

Digital Literature emerged with the introduction of computers and digital technology, distinguishing itself as literature that is oriented towards digital mediums. It should not be mistaken for digitized versions of printed literature. This novel form of literature has become a subject of interest across various academic fields. Multiple definitions exist for Digital Literature, making it challenging to categorize and define precisely. Due to its diverse origins

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and purposes, Digital Literature cannot be seen as a uniform whole, as it has been created at different times, using varying methods, and serving distinct objectives worldwide.

The journal of aesthetics published and gave credit to consider “Stochastic texts” (Stochastische Texte) by Theo Lutz (1959), as the very first piece of Digital Literature. After Lutz’s work, many other authors experimented with the possibilities of computers in creating poetry. However, a few years before, in 1952 Christopher S. Strachey created what could be considered the first piece of digital literature. Strachey is rightly viewed as a pioneer of modern computing, but he is not usually viewed as the creator of the first work of digital literature. Strachey developed—using Turing’s random number generator—a Mark I program that created combinatory “Love Letters” (1952). This was the first piece of digital literature and of digital art, predating the earliest examples of digital computer art by almost a decade.

In the 1960s, with the advancements in hardware and graphical programs, a small group of poets began utilizing digital tools to create visual poems. By the late 1960s, concrete and visual poets shifted their focus towards using computers to represent language graphically. As technology evolved, artists started creating static and animated digital works, manipulating language to enhance visual appeal.

A significant turning point for Digital Literature occurred in the 1980s. In 1985, the "Les Immatériaux" international exhibit held in Paris at the Centre Georges Pompidou, organized by Jean-François Le Lionnais and the ALAMO6 group, introduced its first computer-generated poems. This event marked the emergence of a new form of visual poetry animated by this novel medium. The ALAMO group aimed to develop computational tools and methods to assist writers in their creative process, exploring the potential of computer-assisted writing.

Another crucial milestone occurred in the 1990s when CERN's researchers in Geneva, led by Tim Berners-Lee, developed the technology that popularized the internet. This led to a proliferation of websites featuring "cyber-poetry/cyberliterature," giving rise to a new generation of digital authors. Despite the rapid growth, Digital Literature continued to evolve and expand. (Giovanna Di Rosarioa, Kerri Grimaldib, Nohelia Mezac 2019)

Digital Literature remains a specialized form of literature even in countries with a long history of literary experimentation. While some countries embraced and developed Digital Literature concurrently, others have only recently acknowledged it due to cultural, political, and economic contexts. Digital Literature demands both literary expertise and IT skills, often requiring collaboration between authors, graphic designers, and programmers. This collaborative process alters the traditional concept of authorship, leading to potential issues regarding the proper attribution of contributions.



In certain developing countries, cultural and economic priorities have diverted attention from Digital Literature. Nevertheless, we observe a global and continuous growth of digital literature, evolving through the introduction of new interfaces, mediums, and technologies.

### **Generations of Digital Literature**

Digital Literature is classified into three distinct generations or waves. The first generation encompasses early experiments with electronic and digital media before the widespread use of the internet. The second generation, spanning from 1995 to the present, features innovative works created using custom interfaces and forms, often published on the open web. The third generation emerged around 2005 and continues to the present, relying on established platforms with vast user bases, such as social media networks, apps, mobile and touchscreen devices, and web API services. This generation coexists with the previous one and produces a massive volume of born-digital work tailored for contemporary audiences who are accustomed to digital media.(Urszula Pawlicka 2014)

Each generation of Digital Literature builds upon preceding and contemporary technologies, access, and audiences to develop works and poetic expressions characteristic of their respective moments in time.

### **Digital Literary Artifacts: Nature and Characteristics**

The contemporary digital landscape's digital literary artifacts are finding their place in the ever-changing and expansive eco-systems because of their inherent quality of being editable, interactive, and distributed in newer forms across the changing platforms. These artifacts can add value and be useful since they are dependent on the evolving network of functional relationships they form within specific contexts and organizations. The digital eco-system controls the artifact development and utilization among the users having different stakes also originating the need for complex technical and social management (Kallinikos, J., Aaltonen, A., & Marton, A. (2013).

Digital artifacts are different from physical entities because of the way they are constituted. They are editable and lend themselves to modification in a continuous and systematic way.

Another distinctive feature of a digital artifact is its interactive nature. The user can decide to interact with it and thus be free of fixed responses to a physical artifact. The accessibility and the quality of being able to be modified by other digital objects is also another notable characteristic feature. Digital objects from different digital sources can be brought together to form content on digital platforms. They can significantly be changed for better effect by the subject experts or deep learners. A more important feature is that it is possible to distribute the artifacts across the internet because of the medium's quality of operating with different platforms for example the



hypertext links. Hence, we can say of digital artifacts are changeable and fluid in nature.(Kallinikos, et al (2013).

To sum, “As self-reflexive literary artifacts, works of Digital Literature present us with crafted experiences that reflect changes wrought by the digital turn taking place in the nature of communication, textuality, society, and perhaps even the structure of human thought.” Rettberg, Scott.(2019)

## **Conclusion**

There is a need for a systematic study of global digital literature, its genres, and the face of digital literature. With the addition of new devices like smartphones, watches and virtual reality, and newer platforms of networks, it is imperative that we keep a close watch on the evolving fourth-generation digital literature. The study of the impact of Digital Literature on the authors and newer forms of literary creations, the interactivity with the users, and the inherent capability of Digital Literature to bring forth creativity and innovation, is compelling enough.

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