The Digital Interactive Literature: Between Terminological Challenge and Aesthetics of Reception, and the Interplay of Literary Genres

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Abstract:

This article aims to explore digital interactive literature, which has become a new knowledge field representing the contemporary era in all its modernity. With this development, Arabic literature has entered a new pioneering stage in the form of a new literary genre that combines both literary and electronic elements. It utilizes technological data in its presentation and only communicates with its audience through electronic means. From this perspective, the research idea of digital interactive literature and the interactive relationship between digital writers and readers emerged.

This transition aligns with the reception theory of German origin regarding the dynamism of digital interactive literature. We discussed the most important features of this digital interactive literature and, last but not least, delved into the issue of the intersection of literary genres within interactive literature.

Keywords: littérature numérique interactive ; genres littéraires ; théorie de la réception ; destinataire ; support électronique.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The evolution of technology, information, computers, and the internet has infiltrated our lives in one way or another, whether in the workplace, at home, or even in the realm of entertainment. It has become a reality, and today's generation is the generation of the internet, mobile devices, and satellites, in other words, the generation of high-tech speed. This paved the way to start investing in this interest and utilizing it to establish literature, whether in poetry or prose, using computers and their technologies as effective tools. With its capabilities, it managed to permeate all aspects of life, including the ability to embrace various human experiences, including literary endeavors (poetry and prose). These found in this technology a way to combine different forms and arts, such as literature, visual arts, music, chanting, sculpture, and photography, as well as electronic techniques that must be present. Thus, the creator could make all these elements interact together to create a new text called "Interactive Digital Literature," which is a form of creative expression aimed at developing awareness through the renewal of writing. These texts represent a product of a new world that conveys the reality of the digital society to different Arab and global countries.

The construction and presentation of digital text, a type that suits the reader's taste, is characterized by a broad imagination created by modern life.

Research Problem:

Based on this background, the problem of this article will be formulated through the following questions:

-What is meant by interactive digital literature, and what is its nature?

-Is the electronic reader merely a consumer or also a producer?

-How does interactive reading contribute to the production of interconnected text?

Research Hypotheses:

Based on this problem, we will formulate the following hypotheses: Interactive digital literature is presented on a computer screen, utilizes modern technology data, and allows the creation of a new literary genre that combines technology and literature.

The Arab electronic reader is a producer through the production of digital texts, albeit in limited numbers. This indicates the desire of the creator to engage in the digital imagination experience.

The interconnected text (Hypertext) is considered by some theorists as the death of the author in the digital text to create a new awareness in the reader's relationship with the issue of producing interconnected text and to weaken the author's role in controlling the reader.

Research Methodology:

Given the nature of the topic, our research will rely on analytical, descriptive, and critical methodology aimed at defining interactive digital literature and highlighting the aesthetics of interaction between the creator and the recipient.

Significance of the Research:

The significance of our research lies in highlighting the importance of studies that aim to define the concept of interactive digital literature and to clarify the interactive relationship between authors and digital recipients.

2. Study concepts :

2.1 Digital literature :

is defined as narrative, poetic, or dramatic literature that utilizes information technology in writing and creativity. This means that digital literature uses computer or media devices to create creative texts, transforming literary text into digital, automated, and computational worlds[1].

2.2 Interactive literature :

is concerned with the interactive relationship that occurs between the reader and the text in terms of browsing, reception, and acceptance. This relationship involves several interactive elements, including text, sound, images, motion, the reader, and the computer. It emphasizes both internal interaction (the relationship between textual links) and external interaction (the interaction between the creator and the reader). Interactive literature combines the activities of the writer or narrator and the reader [2].

2.3 Hypertextuality refers to digital literature :

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that is open, hybrid, and highly branched, including multiple interconnected texts and central and subtext formats that interact with each other. Hypertextual digital literature consists of interconnected, interactive, and intertwined texts that engage in cross-referencing, interaction, fusion, and intertwining. In this regard, Said Yaktine explains that hypertext is composed of structures that are not organized, linked together by links activated by the reader, allowing for quick transitions between them [3] .

3. For Interactive Digital Literature and the Terminological Issue:

- Talking about the terminology and its issues, it is worth mentioning that the task of preserving this new creation and attempting to expand its dissemination falls within the priorities of researchers in digital literature. This compels them to delve into the terminological problem of the term "interactive literature," given its multiplicity and ambiguity, in order for it to accompany every new and urgent form and genre in the literary field. It is clear to anyone who explores these various terms[4].

- Interactive poetry has been described with multiple terms, revealing a positive understanding and indicating the richness of the experience through the diversity of components revealed by reading. These terms include interactive, digital, linked, branching, electronic, technological, and others[5] .

Among the most important proposals for translating the term "HYPERTEXT," which denotes this literary genre, are "super text," suggested by Dr. Nabil Ali in his book "Arabs and the Information Age" (1994), "branching text," proposed by Dr. Hussam Al-Khatib in his book "Literature and Technology: The Branching Text" (1996), "interactive text," suggested by Dr. Fatima Al-Briki in her book "Introduction to Interactive Literature" (2006), "linked text," first used by Ted Nelson in 1965, and translated by Dr. Saeed Yaqteen in his book "Linked Text and the Future of Arab Culture: Toward Digital Arabic Writing" (2008). Another term is "branching text," proposed by Dr. Abeer Salama in her article "Branching Text and the Future of the Novel" on the Nisaba website. Some have also used the term "digital text" because it is an Arabic word that can be derived and may help overcome the terminological problem by unifying it [6].

However, the poet Dr. Abdullah bin Ahmed Al-Fayfi from Saudi Arabia believes that the nature of this text calls for replacing the word "digital" with "electronic" as he finds the term "digital" to be ambiguous in its reference to a word that has long been associated with numbers. Therefore, he refers to it as "interactive electronic poetry" instead of "interactive digital poetry."[7]

The term "digital interactive literature" seems to be the closest and most precise in conveying the essence of this literary genre, as the word "interactive" clearly expresses the recipient's interaction with this type of literature based on electronic technologies [8].

3.1 The Features of Digital Interactive Literature [9]:

Digital interactive literature offers an open and boundless text, allowing creators of any creative type to produce a text and share it on a website, leaving readers and users the freedom to complete the text as they wish.

- Interactive literature provides the recipient/user with a sense of ownership over everything presented on the internet. It elevates the status of the recipient, who had been neglected for years by critics and literary enthusiasts, focusing first on the creator and then on the text, and has recently turned its attention to the recipient. Interactive literature makes the recipient, who has recently gained attention from modern literary studies, its starting point, making them the foundation of the interactive creative process in the virtual space .

- Interactive literature recognizes the sole creator of the text. This is because all recipients and users of interactive texts are considered participants and owners of the right to add and modify the original text.

- Beginnings are not fixed in some interactive literature texts. The recipient can choose the starting point from which they want to enter the world of the text. The creator, who first constructs the text, does so based on the absence of a single beginning. The variation in starting points from one recipient to another should lead to differences in the course of events in the narrative or theatrical text, for example.

- Endings are not uniform in most interactive literature texts. The multiplicity of paths implies multiple choices available to the recipient. This leads to each recipient moving in a direction different from that of others, resulting in different endings or at least circumstances leading to those endings, even if they are similar or unified.

- Interactive literature allows recipients the opportunity for live and direct dialogue through the websites that offer interactive texts, whether they are

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novels, poems, or plays. These recipients can engage in discussions about the text and the developments in each of their readings, which often differ from those of others.

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4. Reception Theory and Interactive Literature:

Reception theory draws from various philosophical, intellectual, and critical sources and has ultimately triumphed in emphasizing the importance of the receiver, a neglected aspect in the creative process. This critical theory has rescued the receiver from obscurity and places them at the center of its focus. The primary concern of reception theory revolves around the receiver, as they interact with the creative work, progressively engaging in this process by interpreting the text based on their preconceived notions.

The reading process, according to reception theory, can be divided into three stages:

Firstly : Reception Moment: This stage represents the initial impression a reader gets when first encountering a literary work. It involves the reader's immediate emotional response to the text. The reader forms an initial impression upon their first interaction with the literary work, attempting to taste it and identify its initial characteristics.

Secondly : Interpretation Phase: In the second stage, known as the interpretation moment, readers delve deeper into the text. They strive to uncover the meanings and explanations of concepts within the text to

achieve a deeper understanding. This stage involves exploring implicit meanings and trying to decipher them.

Thirdly : Comprehension Moment: The final stage involves situating the text within its historical context. To fully understand the text's intent, it is essential to consider its historical background. This phase involves answering questions raised by the text and delving into the author's purpose, all while considering the historical context in which it was written [10].
For a long time, readers were marginalized in the realm of literary criticism, and their importance was underestimated. However, their significance has been revived in various directions of literary criticism, including contemporary innovations that emphasize reader participation and contribution to meaning production.
Reception theory and interactive literature intersect in several key ways:

-Focus on the Reader: Both theories prioritize the role of the reader and seek to highlight their significance. They aim to elevate the reader's importance and participation in the meaning-making process[11].
- Interaction between Creator and Receiver: In both reception theory and interactive literature, there is a recognition that the creator and the receiver exist on the same plane. The active engagement of the reader is crucial in both cases, as it contributes to the interaction between the two [12].
- Innovation and Change: Both reception theory and interactive literature have introduced innovative ideas and have significantly impacted literary discourse. Reception theory has legitimized the reader's role, while interactive literature challenges traditional literary forms by incorporating reader participation.
- Reader-Centric Meaning: Both theories emphasize that meaning is constructed based on the interpretation and interaction of the reader. They assert that the reader is the primary determinant of meaning, with no other party sharing this role [13]
- In summary, reception theory and interactive literature share common ground in their emphasis on the reader's role, their recognition of the interaction between creators and receivers, their innovative contributions to literary theory, and their assertion that the reader plays a pivotal role in constructing meaning [14].

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5. Digital Interactive Literature and the Problem of Literary Genre Interference:

5.1 Interactive Poetry:

Poetry has transcended its traditional form of written text on paper and has taken on a new shape in the digital realm, particularly on the internet through electronic media. Creators now employ various techniques not available in traditional written text, such as incorporating audio, images, shapes, and more. Through these means, the creator allows the reader to navigate the text space freely and without constraints, turning the reader into an active participant and collaborator [15].

The emergence of digital interactive poetry requires a comprehensive approach to deal with its complexities, drawing from multiple sources and resources. This genre of text is multifaceted. When examining known forms of art and techniques used to create digital interactive poetry, we find:
-Musical compositions.
- Songs (combining music, poetry, and vocal performance).
- Color spaces (in main and sub-interface backgrounds and in animated advertising banners, or even the colors of poetic text).
- Paintings created in various artistic styles, each referring to a unique poetic expression system.
- Artistic and expressive photographic images.
- Sculptures and statues made from different materials (wood, bronze, etc.), each attributed to artists from various nationalities, cultures, artistic schools, and trends.
- Iconic engineering with advanced digital culture capabilities, seamlessly aligning with all the manifestations of art that contribute to the interactive digital poem's composition[16].

5.2 Interactive Novel:

Digital novels are contemporary literary forms that express the crisis of the digital-age human within the digital society. These novels introduce non-linguistic elements into the narrative, using new forms generated by the digital era. They particularly rely on hypertext, a branching text technology that incorporates electronic animation, sound effects, and lifelike images through software like Flash Multimedia, graphic design, and animation.

These elements become part of the narrative structure itself, enhancing the power of words[17].

An example of an interactive novel is "Saqi' (Ice)" published in 2006 by the writer Mohammed Sinnajla. This work, which includes some poetic elements (two poems), demonstrates how music and lighting are used with minimal words to emphasize the artistic quality of digital text. The author employed digital programs such as Flash Macromedia and graphic design in conjunction with film editing software [18].

5.3 Interactive Theater:

Interactive theater, as a significant literary genre, extends into the vast digital realm. It doesn't solely rely on text but also incorporates digital presentation. Interactive theater becomes a digital play that exists exclusively online, with interaction and reading happening on internet screens. Dr. Fatima Al-Bariki translated the Western term into "Interactive Theater" and defined it as "a new form of literary writing that goes beyond the traditional understanding of literary creativity, as it involves multiple authors, including the reader, in a collaborative, expansive, and collective artistic endeavor" [19]

Charles Deemer is considered a pioneer of interactive theater, having authored the first interactive play in 1985 titled "Château de Mort." He also established an online platform for teaching interactive theater scriptwriting, offering various educational courses. In his interactive theater, Deemer laid the foundation for a new theatrical theory that can be termed "Digital Theater Theory"[20]

The concept of digital theater aims to create a collaborative play online, where individuals from different nationalities and countries can collectively contribute to the storyline. This experimentation in theatrical composition is groundbreaking, as it eliminates the central role of the author, allowing any reader to become another author upon entering the electronic theater's website and participating in the never-ending plot development.

In conclusion, interactive literary genres represent a new creative paradigm made possible through electronic media and interactive capabilities. They rely on advanced computer mechanisms, enabling electronic readers to easily interact with the text and provide their own contributions as they see fit[21].

6. Digital Literature Glossary [22]:

Browsing

Netizens

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Download
Interaction
Framework
Link
Digital
Hyperlinked Novel
Screen
Digital Reader
Interactive
Self-narrative Hyperlinked
Used
Digital Author
Meta-narrative
Text
Hyperlinked Text
Click
Readable Text
Medium
Hyperlinked Medium

7. CONCLUSION

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The conclusion of our study reveals that digital interactive literature is a new literary genre that has successfully established itself through technological advancements. It offers interactive creativity with an open-ended text, allowing producers to generate a text and share it on a website, leaving readers the freedom to continue and modify it. In this context, the electronic reader becomes a producer as they reframe the text in their own unique way, contributing new insights. The text itself encourages interaction by engaging the reader actively.

Through this concise study, we have identified several key findings, including:

Digital literature is defined as text that utilizes electronic media and informational spaces to convey literary content.

Interactive digital literature is a contemporary and innovative creative achievement, embodying cultural attributes that have evolved thanks to the technological era and the use of computers as electronic mediums, facilitating work and saving time.

Digital interactive literature is a new literary genre, bridging the gap between literature and technology, encompassing various literary forms (poetry, theater, short stories, novels, essays, etc.).

The role of the digital recipient enhances aesthetic and ethical features through diverse and varied readings.

Interactive digital literature transports the recipient into the textual world through sound and visual effects.

In conclusion, digital interactive literature has made a significant leap, distinguishing itself from traditional literature by transitioning from the printed format to the new electronic medium. The theory of reception has shed light on the digital recipient's role in the reading process, decoding the multiple interpretations of digital text.

Lastly, this research recommends the necessity of recognizing digital interactive literature as a new and contemporary form of literature, with the electronic medium as a fundamental component driving its evolution.

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