

Camelia GRĂDINARU
“Al. I. Cuza” University of Iași (Romania)
Department of Interdisciplinary Research –
Humanities and Social Sciences

Social Media and Literature: A Troublesome Relationship

Abstract: My paper focuses on the relationship between social media and literature. The development of social networks produced significant changes in terms of reading, writing and commenting habits. In this context, the peril of the decanonization of both literary work and author has been already voiced by a few important writers. In this vein, I am interested to see whether these anxieties have sufficient ground. In order to accomplish the latter, I discuss some of the main standpoints available and I also analyse a particular position expressed by a contemporary writer, along with the subsequent online comments.

Keywords: social media, literature, writing, reading, digital culture, print culture

1. Introduction

Social media interlacement with almost every important sector of contemporary life, from communication to business, did not let the literature out of this changing wave. Social media shaped the way in which people think, read, write, and search information. Their style imbued the contemporary dynamics with the shortness of messages, the speed of communication, and the convergence practices. We mix media tools and platforms, we interact in many ways, we also create content, and we share the stories that touched our feelings. Computers gave us objects-to-think-with, to-read-with, to-write-with, to-distribute-with, and to-archive-with. As Roger Chartier (2004, 142-143) brilliantly put it when he described the changes brought in the order of discourse by the digital era,

“the electronic world thus creates a triple rupture: it provides a new technique for inscribing and disseminating the written word, it inspires a new relationship with texts, and it imposes a new form of organization on texts. The originality and the importance of the digital revolution must therefore not be underestimated insofar as it forces the contemporary reader to abandon—consciously or not—the various legacies that formed it. This new form of textuality no longer uses printing (at least in its typographic sense), it has nothing to do with the *libro unitario*, and it is foreign to the material nature of the codex. It is therefore a revolution that in the same period in time, and for the first time in history, combines a revolution in the technical means for reproducing the written word (as did the invention of the printing press), a revolution in the medium of the written word (like the revolution of the codex), and a revolution in the use of and the perception of texts (as in the various revolutions in reading).”

Even the word “text” has enlarged its meanings to be able to catch this tremendous variety of its instantiation. At this point, the influence of postmodernism and cultural studies is notable, expanding the definitions of text that now encompass software programs, hypertexts, databases, video games, e-mail and so on. In the same time, these new textualities (Portela 2007) had to express the experiences brought by digital interfaces. “Life on the screen” (Turkle 1995) and life driven by mobile communication produced textualities that inform culture and society. The technologies used in order to produce and share content shape the knowledge in the same way the tools used in early days altered the humans’ modalities of evolution. For instance, in terms of archive, the digitization represented a central trait that led to massive projects, such as the one managed by Google, now concretized in Google Books, a very useful tool for readers. Also, Shakespeare Electronic Archive, created by MIT, presents electronic texts linked to digital copies of primary texts. The Walt Whitman Archive had as starting idea to make Whitman’s work freely accessible for readers (fiction, prose essays, letters, notebooks, journalistic articles). In 2009, the Mark Twain Project Online was even designated as an “approved edition” by the MLA Committee on Scholarly Editions, certifying its qualities as a reliable source.

The unstoppable social direction of new media affected the way we interact and emphasised again that the conversation is the centre of new technologies. This is why the written-spoken language of computer-mediated communication and mobile communication preserves the features of the orality, giving voice to a huge number of discontents

related to the presumable ruin of the linguistics. In fact, some misuses of language are a deliberate cue used in order to be highly performative and anarchic in expression (Soffer 2012).

For those concerned with literature, the idea of computer as storyteller (Don 1990) represented a kernel of debates accompanied by polarized feelings. The hypertext, for example, embodied the post-structuralist desires of the open work, networked, proposing multiple paths, and diminishing the author – reader distinctions. Powerful creative tools (such as Storyspace.net) constitute the multimedia writing environment that can help in the process of elaborating, collecting, and experimenting a story. But then the erosion of the author's privacy in favour of a public and constant exposure on social media, the online pressure of being extroverted when many authors are actually introverted or the difficulty to chose among so many digital stories represent just a small part of the dark side of literature – social media relationship.

2. A Few Premises of the Debate

The context of this debate contains several key elements such as: the progress of new media, the development of participatory culture and the media convergence specificities. This context is not just a matter of content, but it also depends on technology and its organization. The principles of new media – numerical representation, modularity, automatisisation, variability and transcoding (Manovich 2001, 27-48) – made possible a set of characteristics that people used instantly in constructing new textual forms, new ways of representing the world or different modes of communication. If new media referred to email and web sites, the “new new media” is social and completely interactive, referring to Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Wikipedia, or Pinterest (Levinson 2013). The social features of old media, even if they are reduced in comparison with the new technologies have determined Levinson to abandon the term “social media” in favour of the term “new new media”. Besides the difficulty of the latter concept in its current use, Levinson is theoretically correct in emphasizing the profound levels of the social orientation of new technologies. They have transformed the way we communicate, do politics or do shopping, encouraging the fact that readers should become writers and most of the passive viewers should become performers. The user-generated content represents a moment in the democratization process that the new technologies brought with. The audience is now formed by prosumers, interactive people that post,

comment, and generally speaking, have a “voice”. The participatory culture has as a supposition the fact that all media producers and consumers are participants to the large conversation, even if not all participate equally (the participatory gap, and also the digital divide, remain two elements that block the tendencies of generalization in this field). All the media are interrelated in the process of convergence that represents “the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behavior of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want” (Jenkins 2006, 2). The increasing use of mobile communication instantiates the circulation of various stories in different modalities: audio, video, text, with a special accent on authenticity, immediacy, and life transmissions. According to a general standpoint, all that we post, from texts to images, represents forms of digital storytelling. These stories create a kind of textual and iconic atmosphere in which many people live, retrieve information, or shape opinions. Facebook, for instance, has become a hub where one can find the synthesis of a day, the first “place” visited before other sites. Thus, the way in which these stories are written and presented, their brevity, their style are elements that influence how we think, how we argue, and how we select future readings. Specific online forms – such as blogs – have introduced an informal, personal, and shared writing, that combines private autobiographical insights with public expression. Also, there exists a large typological diversity of blogs, some of them being only information spaces based on personal hobbies (gastronomy, travel, books, and so on). Collective projects – such as Wikipedia – have generated “patterns and meanings without any clear authors or editors controlling the linking” (Rettberg 2005, 47), instantiating some well-known post-structuralist ideas. Deepening fragmentation and speed, people adapt their discourses to the medium they use, but, as Marie-Laure Ryan emphasized when she discussed about the case of narrative in digital media, “the new way of presenting stories does not mean that the stories themselves are radically different from traditional narrative patterns” (2001). In the same time, every medium has its own expressive resources which can produce different forms and effects, so the question is what is this valuable resource for digital media? For Ryan, the answer is the interactivity that conducts to some modes of participation of digital texts in narrativity.

The mix between the characteristics of personal media and the traits of distribution belonging to mass media seems highly representative for new media. The micro-publishing and group practices, and the personal

media have shaped the road “toward a minor literature” (Wittig 2018: 116), that is to say:

“*minor* in contrast to high literary forms such as the holy trinity of poem, short story, and novel; *informal* in contrast to works vetted, edited, and published in major journals; *interactive* because reactions from readers are expected and can rapidly be published alongside the text; and *vernacular* because they are cultural practices that develop from everyday use and are not, or not yet, taught in schools and universities”.

As Steven Johnson put it long ago, we are living at the interface and also “our interfaces are stories we tell ourselves to ward off senselessness” (1997, 242). The everyday immersion in social media supposes a connection with technology that everyone interprets in her or his way: as an extension, as an instrument to work with, or as a force that drives a lot of changes.

Besides the presuppositions discussed above, the main cultural debate print culture *versus* digital culture assured a nuanced quarrel between the Gutenberg principles and the new media ones. The paradigms of interpreting digital textuality (substitution, supplementation, and remediation) do not create an opposition between paper-based textuality and computer-based textuality, but rather a subtle relationship (Grădinaru 2014). Mark Z. Danielewski’s *House of Leaves* is a well-known example of how print and digital can overlap, creating “a sort of intermedia feedback loop” (Portela 2007, 128), where the book remediated the electronic text. In the same book, the ergodic literature does not contain only electronic texts, on the contrary, it refers to any kind of text that supposes a nontrivial effort in order to traverse it (Aarseth 1997). As Eco stated in his conversation with Jean-Claude Carrière, “the book has been thoroughly tested, and it’s very hard to see how it could be improved on for its current purposes. Perhaps it will evolve in terms of components; perhaps the pages will no longer be made of paper. But it will still be the same thing” (Carrière and Eco 2012). In the same vein, Bolter (2001, 2) assumes that the move from print to computer does not mean the end of literacy itself, but only “the literacy of print, for electronic technology offers us a new kind of book and new ways to write and read”. Another “optimistic humanist” is Richard Lanham who very early affirmed that “electronic expression has come not to destroy the Western arts and letters, but to fulfill them. And I think too that the instructional practices built upon the electronic word will not repudiate the deepest and most fundamental currents of Western

education in discourse but redeem them” (1993, xiii). Despite the changes in paradigms, a more moderate perspective is desirable against both extremist utopic and dystopic scenarios.

3. Literature under Scrutiny in the Age of Social Media

It is more than obvious that social media produced a consistent change of scenery in terms of reading behaviours. Whether this change of scenery represents, in fact, a sign for a much deeper level of meaning, remains to be seen. The same goes for our (aging?) Gutenberg mind (as coined by writer Will Self (2014), among others), which seemingly gives way for a faster and more consumable-prone counterpart. Moreover, the garbage bin has never been so easy to use: the disposability of the electronic pages surpasses the let-go that we usually employ when we try to get rid of an uninteresting book.

Literature complicates things, and this is no secret. Like any form of art, it fuels contemplation, doubt and philosophical awareness. Many a times it does not offer instant gratification, let alone the augmentation of our consumption desire. The loudness of the social networks is replaced with the tormenting silence brought about by a well-crafted page from a novel. It really became a nuisance.

The “too many stories” argument is flawed

Will Self (2014) discusses briefly the fact that the development of the internet and of the social networks led to a spectacular growth of the number of stories. Anyone can post virtually anything and we sometimes look in awe how completely unknown users get millions of views and thousands of comments. But are those stories equally valuable? It depends on what we understand by valuable. We could make a case for stories that would keep the critics less than unimpressed, but nevertheless make serious impression on the general public. We could also remember that the internet is full of stories that provide care, self-consciousness, practical advice, identification cues, coming-out space or “They are as crazy as I am” guidance. It would be so weird to coin them “worthless”. But can we tag them as “literature”? The main fear circles around the idea that more and more readers would fail to acknowledge valuable material from the immensity of information available.

Is this form of democratization a real threat? We could argue that it may prove difficult to step up from the multitude of available texts. But there also could be a form of compensation for that matter. On the one

hand, a writer gets an entirely new universe that she or he can use as part of the work. The process of writing fiction has always involved new topics, new situations and facts of life which attracted the readers in the first place. If we look back to the nineteenth century, we find a lot of nineteenth century subjects and experiences encapsulated in the chief works. We seldom use the phrase “ahead of his or her time”, expressing our love for the virtue of sound anticipation, but we don’t have something similar to state the contrary case. On the other hand, a big part of people’s life has moved online. Is it wrong to think that their minds might be ready for subsequent themes in the novels?

The novel didn’t die because of the railways

The concept of professional writing remains a key trait for our society, and one can easily find proof for that not only in the specific field of literature, but also in fields like copywriting, marketing or public speaking. But I think if there will ever be a death of the novel – like Will Self seems to predict – I doubt that the main suspect should be searched along the developments of social media. If such a thing happens, surely this must involve more than one defining variable, let alone the fact that the novel has been previously pronounced dead on different grounds. Self uses the phrase “tectonic cultural shifts” to point out the magnitude of change brought by the Internet and the social media. This gigantic wave, Self implies, would probably wipe out the novel as a genre and possibly its author too, deprived of solitude and stillness. But things are not necessarily going in that direction. O’Hagan (2017) presents the story of Dickens’s fears towards the railways. Dickens felt that the latter did not constitute just a means of transportation, but actually the sign of a much deeper societal transformation that would fundamentally shatter the world as he knew it. Needless to say, the novel survived the monstrosity of the railway and the writers have made good use of it, although not always for the happiest of circumstances.

What Dickens knew along McLuhan and Self is the fact that “in the long run, it is always the medium that wins”. But I don’t see how this automatically changes the fate of the novel. It is however possible – and even desirable – that the novel does not get out of this “crisis” unchanged.

Another possible danger is underlined, among others, by Jacobs (2014) in an article published in *Huffington Post*. Briefly, the ultraminimalism of tweets and Facebook comments may be interpreted as potentially harmful as they help develop a habitude of producing and receiving short messages. These short syntactic and semantic units might

endanger, one could argue, our openness towards the novel. The reception of a good novel, say, could fail because the very first step in the process is corrupted by our unwilling minds. Moreover, online typical behaviors such as squirreling or bouncing seem to be the opposite of what a novel needs from the readers. In order for this encounter to work, the solitude and the silent effort of creation must be met by the solitude and the contemplation-oriented mind of the reader.

Phil James (2014) noticed a key fact: when dealing with social media content, people usually – I must repeat, usually – give simple forms of feed-back, mostly likes and their close relatives and comments. Even if this might be well-intended, it is way too small a reaction. But we can go even further: what if we get used to this lack of nuance in our evaluations or when we validate what we read? Can we employ the same simple framework of feed-back when judging a novel?

Again, even if the scepticism above might have some ground, our electronic experience proves that the reality is so much more complicated. Talking about old reading practices, Darnton notices something revealing:

“Time was when readers kept commonplace books. Whenever they came across a pithy passage, they copied it into a notebook under an appropriate heading, adding observations made in the course of daily life. Erasmus instructed them how to do it; and if they did not have access to his popular *De Copia*, they consulted printed models or the local schoolmaster” (Darnton 2009, 149)

This actually happens now with e-books, when you can get an annotated copy of a classic. People make comments that are not only valuable for the understanding of the work, but even insightful at times. In fact, the original text becomes the core of a new set of stories which only partially overlap, but nevertheless create arabesques of meaning that are, simply, beautiful. The digital media allow readers to take part in the conversation. A risqué attitude, granted, but beside the danger of quality loss we find the pleasure of collaborative reading. I see no reason why the creative writers would not sneak in into this conversation and develop their own stories.

4. Reception and Interpretation: An Example

For an in-depth analysis of this problem, I chose to investigate how the relationships between social media and literature was presented in a British daily newspaper – *The Guardian* – that has a consistent part

dedicated to culture (with the following divisions: books, music, TV and radio, art and design, film, games, classical, and stage). Thus, the article “Will social media kill the novel? Andrew O’Hagan on the end of private life”, published on 17 June 2017, represents a perfect example for a concrete investigation of our issue. A) At one level, I will analyse Andrew O’Hagan’s opinions about the relationship between literature and social media. O’Hagan is a Scottish author and creative writing fellow at King’s College London. He wrote, among others, *Our Fathers* (1999), *Personality* (2003), *The Illuminations* (2015), *The Secret Life: Three True Stories of the Digital Age* (2017). Thus, we can get in touch with an authentic perspective of a contemporary writer, that cannot be generalized, but with an undeniable value. B) At another level, I will investigate the opinions of the readers expressed in 154 comments on this article. Because the users are mostly anonymous and we cannot assume something about their cultural background, book preferences or new media literacy, this analysis can bring out the ways in which an audience can interpret it.

A) O’Hagan looks nostalgic for his past lived “between the TV and the library book”, a past best described as “a perfect circle of private experience”. The personal experience is always an authorial filter and also a real support for the narrative plot. In this article (2017), O’Hagan identifies the two relevant media of his development: TV and print. In the same time, he remarked that SF writers were “common realists, no less faithful than Charles Dickens to life’s essential change”, acknowledging the role of technology in societal and cultural changes. I would add that every society had its own technological development or inventions that provoked anxiety

For O’Hagan, the central issue that is played in the literature / writer – social media relationship is *the privacy*: the writer is dependent on privacy, whereas social networking sites are public, demanding an extrovert kind of people:

“One of the great fights of the 21st century will be the fight for privacy and self-ownership, which is also, to my mind, the struggle for literature as distinct from the dark babble of social media. Writers thrive on privacy, not on Twitter, and so do readers when the lights are low” (O’Hagan 2017).

We can notice the positioning of literature as a part of high culture, whilst social media is seen as a meaningless chatter that only disturbs the writers, and also the readers. The privacy is conceived as the natural

environment for an author, since the social media exposure is perceived as totally inadequate for her or him. Thus, the contemplation is reaffirmed as an essential part of a writer's life, a characteristic that feels incompatible with the social media noise, which can be assimilated with a contemporary Tower of Babel:

“giving your sentences thoughtlessly away, and for nothing, seems a small death to contemplation, and does harm to the profession of writing, where you're paid because you're good at it. We are all entertainers now, politicians are theatrical in their every move, but even merely passable writers have something large at stake when it comes to opposing the global stupidity contest” (O'Hagan 2017).

Phil James (2014) has a similar idea: social media can be loud and they do not represent the suiting place for contemplative and meditative reflexion. Also, some forms of literature may disappear in this medium because they are not suitable for him. As an example,

“it becomes nearly impossible to discover the next Emily Dickinson or Marcel Proust on major social platforms, because they lack a key ingredient: sociability. Social media is allowing non-artists such as marketing teams to become the main orators of poetry – and in doing so, is destroying the medium as a whole” (James 2014).

In order to exist on social media a lot of time and energy is required, indeed. The writer could spare some and spend it in specific activities such as documentation and editing, lest the inspiration should come from the online stories or from the habits of the contemporary people. Anyhow, a small comment: James wrote his inspiring “8 Reasons Why Social Media Is Decimating Art and Literature” (2014) online. Maybe the problem is that the development of new media and its remarkable insertion in almost every sector of our lives require a new kind of *literacy* that had to be learned alongside the classical ones. As Gunther Kress (2003, 23) noticed,

“the new technologies of information and communication complicate this picture seriously, in that they bring together the resources for representation and their potential with the resources of production and the resources of dissemination. It is this conflation which has led to some of the too ready extension of the term ‘literacy’: using the computer has aspects of all three”.

This can be inconvenient and *cronophage*: even if a writer preserves her or his mode of creating, a lot of things still have to be made, such as the online promoting of the book or even increasing the online visibility of the author. In a world where everybody uses online tools to get oneself noticed, it is not easy to ignore these possibilities. Of course, for introvert persons, but not only for them, these things put a high pressure that can disconnect them from the real goals of writing itself.

O'Hagan presents the perils brought by the online democratization of speech: when everybody talks and writes online, the profession of writer tends to be undervalued. This is a debatable idea, because there will always be levels of proficiency, stories better than others and people more gifted than others. And sometimes, in times of crisis, quantity can lead to quality, even if the initial feeling is that quantity flattens out everything. This is why not everybody becomes an influencer in online and only a few individuals have millions of followers. In the same time, it is right to admit that it becomes harder than formerly to be a writer in the contemporary media context, when the judgment of a work can be more aggressive and sometimes done just on the strength of this democratization of comment. In this context, I remember Jacques Derrida's response to this key question about the survival of literature and philosophy beyond paper:

“Like many people, I make the best of my nostalgia, and without giving anything up, I try, more or less successfully, to accommodate my ‘economy’ to all the paperless media. I use a computer, of course, but I don't e-mail, and I don't ‘surf’ the internet, even though it is something I use as a theoretical topic, in teaching or elsewhere. A matter of abstention, abstinence-but also of self-protection. One of the difficulties is that nowadays any public discourse (and sometimes any private action, any ‘phenomenon’) can be ‘globalized’ in the hour after it happens, without it being possible to exercise any rights of control. This is sometimes terrifying (and once again, new not so much in its possibility as in its power, the speed and the scope, the objective technicality of its phenomenality), and sometimes it's funny” (Derrida 2005, 64).

In Rorty-like fashion, O'Hagan considers that literature “might inhance the public sphere but it more precisely enriches the private one” (2017). For him, the privacy is a value at risk in times of Internet changes, when the networks can archive your texts, photos, searches and so on. The Internet can become an efficient Panopticon that offers the feeling of freedom, but also collects a lot of information about you. The precious interior life has transformed its meaning nowadays: “it refers to who are

you inside the web” (O’Hagan 2017). This displacement is critical for writers because the inner life has always been a sacred “place” which transforms the experiences in literature. The “customized” self made by online branding strategies seems to be far away from this canonical idea of the inner life of a writer.

O’Hagan thinks that the Internet addiction appeared before we could have really understood how new media work and how deep their consequences would be. Also, “in a sense, it gave the tools of fiction-making to everybody equally, so long as they had access to a computer and a willingness to swim into the internet’s deep well of otherness” (O’Hagan 2017). O’Hagan cannot firmly tell if “the abolition of privacy will kill the novel” or “it will make it new” (O’Hagan 2017). This is, indeed, an in-progress phenomenon, and only a visionary spirit could tell how this relationship will turn in the future. Anyhow, “in a world where everybody can be anybody, where being real is no big deal, some of us to work back to the human problems, driven by a certainty that our computers are not ourselves. In a hall of mirrors we only seem like someone else” (O’Hagan 2017). So, for the present moment, the position of writers and of literature as a whole are in question, facing challenges and re-settings.

B) I analysed the 154 comments posted in order to delineate the general reception of the relationship between social media and literature. The conversation was challenging and it touched upon the main implications of this subject. In this vein, the main categories of issues discussed are:

- *Social and cultural changes and the literature*: if one part of the commentaries sustained the relevance of a work in default of knowing its context, another part of users considered that context is essential when we try to understand its message. Related to this topic, we found the debate concerning the changing versus unchanging human nature: if the human nature remains essentially the same over the centuries, than any kind of literary work, from any time, is relevant for people no matter when they live.

- *Privacy issue*: the scale was from “zero privacy anyway”, “privacy hasn’t been abolished. My house still has a door that I can lock. My computer and phone have ‘off’ switches. I can be as private or public as I’d like to be”, to “privacy is a social construct”. A very interesting comment noted that “I would hold it is not so much the loss of privacy

which will kill the novel, but the loss of literacy which threatens it brutally, but not utterly”.

- *Old media and the literature*: media could not kill literature – “no, neither radio nor the movies or TV killed the novel. And virtual reality and the internet won’t kill it either. Question answered” *versus* literature already killed by old media: “It was killed some time ago (I take no pleasure in this as a writer) by film and television. All social media has done is confirm their lonely status as elite historians (Hilary Mantel) or their denigrated status as side-show-artists-screenwriters”, “It’s not social media that has killed the novel. It’s television – with an assist from authors who can’t actually tell an interesting story in an elegant, comprehensible way”. This subject was integrating into a large area in which the destiny of literature was to compete with other things: oral tradition, television, computers and social media.

- *New media and literature*: the commentators discussed the problem of attention in the context of fragmentation produced by new media. Thus, someone said: “I find having a smart phone with me most of the time has killed my attention span for reading books. I used to try read a book a week depending on its length, now I’m lucky if I finish a book in a month”. Also, another user confessed: “avid reader all my adult life... enter smart phone – attention span of a mosquito”. Also, people talked about ebooks *versus* print books, comparing their advantages and disadvantages.

- *The novel and social media*: it was a complex and multi-layered discussion. The most relevant opinions can be arranged in the following clusters:

- *Social media killed the novel*: “Internet, videogames and mobile phones have already killed novels and, more widely, traditional reading in general.”
- *Social media did not killed the novel*, because that is “an absurd generalization”, because “how can you kill something that died quiet a while ago?”
- *More nuanced discussion is needed*, because “maybe the assumption surrounding this thing called the novel carries too much weight?” Clarifications about definitions, perspectives and meanings of concepts is required:

“*What does ‘being dead’ mean?* There is not a single art form that had fully vanished. Photography and cinema didn’t destroy water-colour painting and puppet theatre. Internet didn’t kill the novel. *Usually ‘dead’ means that the novel is not the*

dominating narrative form anymore. There are many reasons, the biggest ones being 1) the multitude of other, mainly audio-visual mediums and 2) the fragmentation of readership into smaller sub-genres”.

“*Depends what is meant by a novel.* If one is referring to a linear narrative of logically sequential events, populated by human beings with interior lives that transcend scientific concepts – then yes, such an art form is indeed imperilled. We are living in an increasingly post-humanist world, and the novel in its eighteenth and nineteenth century manifestations was a prime expression of humanism”.

- *The novel needs to evolve:* “the novel will morph into something else, the interactive novel”, “multimedia or transmedia is the question”.
- *Compatibilities with social media:* “We should all serialise our books on Facebook and the illustrated ones on Instagram. Dickens would approve in this increasingly Victorian age. Twitter may be more suitable for poetry”.
- *“Why worry” attitude:* “You know people can use social media and read novels, just like you can have more than one friend or watch more than one TV channel. Still, it is funny to read an article where someone is panicking about nothing”.
- *Opportunities for the novel:* “the novel is in the midst of a new ‘Golden Age’”; “social media will only kill the novel if we let it”.

The comments analysed formed a condensed conversation that succeeded in pointing out the most important elements of this ongoing debate.

5. Instead of Conclusions, a Challenge

Will computers write literature? The case for literature has always been made according to the idea that the latter encapsulates the authenticity of the human experience, the first person account and the ineluctable qualia. This irreducible individuality has constantly been associated with the human condition *par excellence*. But is it necessarily so? Couldn't we imagine the replication of human genre in the field of computer literature? We might be mistaken when we automatically assume that humanity completely covers the concept of authenticity.

We are probably more than thinking machines made of flesh, but why the thinking machines made of silicone would not write cathartic

poetry of their own? We know already that recently there have been signs of computers developing their own language, and that basically means that self-expression is just around the corner.

References

- AARSETH, Espen. 1997. *Cybertext: Perspectives on Ergodic Literature*. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- BOLTER, David Jay. 2001. *Writing Space: Computers, Hypertext, and the Remediation of Print*. 2nd ed. Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- CARRIÈRE, Jean-Claude, ECO, Umberto. 2012. *This Is Not the End of the Book. A conversation curated by Jean-Philippe de Tonnac*. Translated from the French by Polly McLean. London: Harvill Secker (E-book).
- CHARTIER, Roger. 2004. "Languages, Books, and Reading from the Printed Word to the Digital Text". *Critical Inquiry* 31: 133-152.
- DARNTON, Robert. 2009. *The Case for Books: Past, Present, and Future*. New York: Public Affairs.
- DERRIDA, Jacques. 2005. *Paper Machine*. Translated by Rachel Bowlby. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- DON, Abbe. 1990. "Narrative and the Interface". In *The Art of Human Computer Interface Design*, edited by Brenda Laurel, 383-391. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
- GRĂDINARU, Camelia. 2014. "The Text and Its Space(s). Textual Practices in the Digital Culture". In *Book Practices and Textual Itineraries 2, Textual Practices in the Digital Age*, edited by Nathalie Collé-Bak, Monica Latham and David Ten Eyck, 49-76. Nancy: PUN – Editions Universitaires de Lorraine.
- JAMES, Phil. 2014. "8 Reasons Why Social Media Is Decimating Art and Literature". <https://qwiklit.com/2014/03/08/8-reasons-why-social-media-is-decimating-art-and-literature/>
- JENKINS, H. 2006. *Convergence culture: Where old and new media collide*. New York and London: New York University Press.
- JACOBS, M. W. 2014. "Social Media and Literature". *The Huffington Post* 18 February. https://www.huffingtonpost.com/mw-jacobs/social-media-and-literatu_b_4802442.html
- JOHNSON, Steven A. 1997. *Interface Culture: How New Technology Transforms the Way We Create and Communicate*. New York: Basic Books.
- KRESS, Gunther. 2003. *Literacy in the New Media Age*. London: Routledge.
- LANHAM, Richard A. 1993. *The Electronic Word: Democracy, Technology, and the Arts*. Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press.
- LEVINSON, Paul. 2013. *New New Media*. Second Edition. Boston: Pearson.

- MANOVICH, Lev. 2001. *The Language of New Media*. Cambridge, Massachusetts, London: The MIT Press.
- O'HAGAN, Andrew. 2017. "Will Social Media Kill the Novel? Andrew O'Hagan on the end of private life". *The Guardian* 14 June. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/jun/17/privacy-literature-social-media-andrew-ohagan>
- PORTELA, Manuel. 2007. "New Textualities". *European Journal of English Studies* 11 (2): 121-132.
- RETTBERG, Jill Walker. 2005. "Feral hypertext: when hypertext literature escapes control". *Proceedings of the sixteenth ACM conference on Hypertext and hypermedia*. ACM: 46-53.
- RYAN, M. L. 2001. "Beyond myth and metaphor". *Game Studies* 1 (1), <http://www.gamestudies.org/0101/ryan/>
- SELF, Will. 2014. "The novel is dead (this time it's for real)". *The Guardian* 2 May. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/may/02/will-self-novel-dead-literary-fiction>
- SOFFER, O. 2012. "Liquid language? On the personalization of discourse in the digital era". *New media & society* 14(7): 1092-1110.
- TURKLE, Sherry. 1995. *Life on the Screen*. New York, London, Toronto, Sydney: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks.
- WITTIG, Rob. 2018. "Literature and Netprov in Social Media: A Travesty, or, in Defense of Pretension". In *The Bloomsbury Handbook of Electronic Literature*, edited by Joseph Tabbi, 113-132. London: Bloomsbury.