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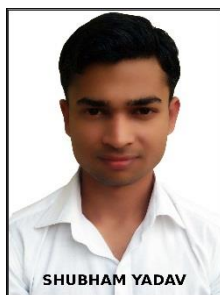
TWITTER FICTION: AN EXPRESSION OF EXPERIMENTAL POSTMODERN E-LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

The present paper mainly discusses how literary art is redefined in the contemporary digital age and examines Twitter fiction as a revolutionary genre of digital literature. Social media has undeniably transformed the world in this age of the internet, and also it has massively affected the world of literature as well. Twitter, specifically has become a successful social platform for the exchange of ideas, news, and information. It has a global reach and is used on a daily basis by millions of people. Twitter has now become a representative frontier medium of E-literature which allows a unique mode of digital storytelling that facilitates creative literary snippets. "Brevity is the soul of wit." as stated by Shakespeare. Twitter is swiftly becoming an experimental platform for both new and established writers as they are increasingly taking part in producing 280 characters' literary works on Twitter.

The popularity of short stories Has swollen up with the rise of digital storytelling. a tweet can be an entire bite-sized story or even a glimpse of a broad story that requires readers' active imagination to complete. As Orson Welles once quoted: "The absence of limitations is the enemy of art", numerous writers are publishing fiction on Twitter, thus embracing the challenge of the 280-character limit and are persistently coming up with creativity in storytelling techniques. Conventional critics might resist, but Twitter literature: i.e. Twitterature, is just a new leap in a long history of experimentation in literature. This paper proposes that twitter can be considered as an expression of experimental postmodern, E-literature platform which can assure the revival of fiction reading habit which is persistently declining from the interest of tech enthusiastic generation.

Keywords – Twitter, Digital, Literature, Constrained Writing, Fiction, Art.

Introduction

There have been several technological transformative shifts in the last few years. Technology's effect has touched every corner of today's world. Its commercial, social, educational and political impact has been unprecedented, and it has also made an enormous impact on the literature as well. The introduction of superfast internet

access, cloud storage, development of AR, AI, software, bots, Translation technology, smartphones, and Social media networks, all became important platforms and marketplaces for digital works. All of these technological shifts are now deciding how the new literature would be written in direct and subtle ways.

As technology advanced, people have changed the way of how they write. As of April 2019, 56.1% of the world's population has internet access, and 81% of the developed world. The number of Internet users is growing at an extraordinary pace. It can somewhat show how much people like to interact on social media. The new generation is given much more opportunities than the old generation to write, by social media. Social media provides an open platform for all people. We can broadcast our views to the world, potentially reaching millions of readers. As long as we are connected to the Internet, we are able to write on social media anytime and anywhere. After all, Connection is a human need.

But critics don't view all such shifts toward the digital environment as favorable for literature. Studies suggest a decline in fiction reading. A sharp fall in literary fiction sales is visible. Arts Council England (ACE) blames the rise of smartphones. Internet and Social media, in general, is taking the blame for disconnecting young people from literature. "*Literature found itself at war with the internet*," as Jim Hinks, digital editor of Comma Press, succinctly puts it. Whereas Author Tim Parks argues that our technology-shredded attention has definitively doomed the literature, Frequent interruptions and endless distractions make it difficult to read novels in the 21st century. On the other hand, a novelist Will Self claims that "*the literary novel as an artwork and a narrative art form central to our culture is indeed dying before our eyes*", Frank Kermode's comment from the 1960s, that "*the special fate of the novel, considered as a genre, is to be always dying*", also make relevance. We 'like' and 'favorite' our way through the day – does this mean now we no longer like the literature? Digital publishers Canelo pessimistically states that "*literary fiction is often 'difficult' and expensive: it isn't free, and it requires more concentration than Facebook or Candy Crush*". "*I don't really mind if people stop reading big middlebrow Victorian novels – that's no great loss, and frankly I wouldn't miss Faulkner very much either*." As the award-winning novelist John Banville quoted.

Primarily, to position social media and literature in opposition to one another is to

misunderstand the use of literature. In itself, literature is media, a tool for messaging, communication, an art, and more often is social, reliant upon interaction with at least one other human being. All media are platforms of human communication and expression, and in this sense, all media, including literature, is social. Perhaps it is a time for fiction reading to adapt to the technological climate in order to remain relevant and exciting.

Altogether if we look at Definitions of the word *literature*, they tend to be circular. Some widely accepted *Dictionaries* like *Oxford Dictionary*, *the 11th edition of Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, *English Cambridge dictionary*, provides definitions of literature which collectively refers to, "a body of written works which holds an artistic value." As an art, literature might be described as the organization of words to give pleasure. Yet through words, literature elevates and transforms experience beyond "mere" pleasure. Developments in technology has allowed an ever-growing distribution and proliferation of such pleasurable written works, culminating in electronic literature. Orson Welles once quoted: "*The absence of limitations is the enemy of art*."

Rhetorical constrained writing in literature-

In "The Rhetorical Situation" (1968), Lloyd Bitzer notes that are "*made up of persons, events, objects, and relations which are part of the situation because they have the power to constrain decision or action*." In other words, constrained writing is a form of literary production in which the writer submits his/her text to specific formal constraints. such constraints function as boundaries and are not primarily intended as strict limitations but rather as creative stimuli for the artistic process and thus contribute to a stronger focus on the criteria on which genuine literature should be based. Most fundamental are the constraints imposed by language, accepted style, and grammar. Such constraint writing challenges the writer's skill. With each new experiment, one might just find that his/her poetry or prose becomes more distinctive or more refined. The author is free to focus on the 'rule'. And approaching writing in this way can

unlock strange and exciting work that writers couldn't get in other ways.

Some claim constrained writing to be an exhibition of the notion that less is more. Others see it as a cheap trick that limits expression and artistic skill. Despite all, it became a recognized Oulipo Movement in 1960s France and has generated many interesting works.

There is a long tradition of imposing constraints in the process of writing. In essence, imposing limits can be freeing. This might sound paradoxical. But limitations in literature can be surprisingly liberating for writers. Here are the few most notable examples of constraint literature

1. **Gadsby by Ernest Vincent Wright**-This 50,000-word novel is completely devoid of the letter 'E,' the most common letter in the English language.
2. **Le Train de Nulle Part ('The Train from Nowhere')** by Michel Thaler-This impressive 233-page novel, written in 2004, does not contain a single verb.
3. **Never Again by Doug Nufer**-True to its title, no word is repeated in this nearly 200-page long story
4. **Green Eggs and Ham by Dr. Seuss**-most well-known book, Green Eggs and Ham only uses 50 words throughout the entire story.

Above mentioned examples only includes novels, but constrained writing is also a defining characteristic of poetry. By imposing a fixed form on their language, poets and writers hope to expand their creative possibilities. These following examples in poetics are proof that creativity can blossom, even when given limitations. All three forms of poetry impose heavy restrictions on the writer.

1. **Haiku**- A haiku has three lines and 14 syllables, in pattern 5, 7, 5
2. **Tanka**- Tanka consists of 31 syllables in 5 lines, in pattern 5, 7, 5, 7, 7
3. **Sonnet**- Sonnets consist of 14 lines, in the pattern of an octave and a sestet or three quatrains and a rhyming couplet.

Traditional forms of poetry are excellent examples of constrained writing. In modern

literature, most writers have their own personal restrictions.

The very first form of digital constraint writing emerged in the form of a *cell phone novel*, or *mobile phone novel*. It is a literary work originally written on a cellular phone via text messaging. This type of literature originated in Japan, where it becomes a popular literary genre. Cell phone novels create personal space for each individual reader. As Paul Levinson wrote in *Cellphone*, "nowadays, a writer can write just about as easily, anywhere, as a reader can read" (p 20).

The phenomenon has brought a new approach to literature, allowing a new vision to potentially redefine traditional writing and the publishing world. Also, it has brought out a new era of minimalism and art. In each chapter, readers will be able to experience narration, poetry and even visual arts in the use of carefully chosen line breaks, punctuation, rhythm and white space. Japan's first cell phone novel was produced by "Yoshi," named "Deep Love: Ayu's Story" (2003). In Japan in 2007 the story "Koizora: Setsunai Koi Monogatari, lit. "Sky of Love: A Sad Love Story" became the number-one selling novel. In 2007, ninety-eight cell phone novels were published as books, five of which became best-sellers. A few, like Mika's "sky of love," were even adapted into movies.

Twitter as a developing constrained fiction writing platform-

Twitter was designed by current CEO Jack Dorsey in March 2006. Dorsey came up with an idea of using an SMS service to share information within a small group. The initial project code name for this service was twttr. As of the fourth quarter of 2018, Twitter had **321 million** global MAU (monthly average user). Every second, on average, around **6,000** tweets are tweeted on Twitter, which corresponds to over **350,000** tweets sent per minute, **500 million** tweets per day and around **200 billion** tweets per year. Twitter users are now getting 280 characters per tweet instead of the traditional 140 characters. Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey said that the expanded tweet length hasn't actually changed the length of messages people are sending out — but it has certainly led to more engagement.

Twitter has been used as a platform for a wide variety of purposes in many scenarios by different industries. It is used as the means for direct communication among social groups and organizations, especially with the use of hashtags, which enable a tweet to be viewed by all users who follow a given topic that starts with the hash (#) symbol. Twitter is one of the most popular (and powerful) social media networks around and has become increasingly popular with academics as well as journalist, celebs, politicians and the general public.

Melissa Terras, professor of Digital Cultural Heritage, at the University of Edinburgh, says that *“Every literary medium has some kind of constraint, and Twitter is simply the latest restriction. It’s the role of literature to play with forms. In poetry, we have very rigid checks, and people have to operate within those constraints. With Twitter fiction, people are taking the limitation of 280 characters and doing something creative. It’s a slightly different art form and it creates a different experience of fiction.”*

With every status update and tweet, the millions of individuals on social-networking sites are more than staying connected—they are reading, writing, editing, and interpreting the written word more than any generation in history. many would argue that smartphone users are less interested in reading literature than updating Facebook Status. But the benefits of our social connectedness goes beyond greater sharing, awareness, and communication—writers in today’s e-age are using short-form content in fascinating new ways, embracing character-count restrictions and facilitating crowd-source stories, experimenting with form, and engaging in direct-distribution tactics. the smart screen might end up being more significant for how it is inspiring a new generation of mobile authors to experiment with prototypes for future forms of fiction. In this age of texting, the littlest texts may matter most.

Twitter and the Internet, in general, wasn't created with writers in mind. But the medium was created accidentally. Its brevity forces us to choose our words carefully, a skill we should acquire online

or offline. Twitter is giving voice to writers who would otherwise shift away to a corner.

Twitter fiction-

Twitter Fiction is a relatively new form of story writing where very short stories, within the character limit, are published on Twitter. In the last decade, Twitter Fiction has grown to become a celebrated short story form, even celebrating its own Twitter Fiction literary festival and literary magazine annually.

The form introduces a few different names. call them Twits, Twabbles, nano-fiction, micro-fiction, Twists, or Twizzlers or Whatever, some examples of 280-character fiction can be found using the official handle, #twitterfiction. The Writers of all domain are publishing on Twitter, from a novice to established literary giants. David Mitchell, Phillip Pullman, Helen Fielding, Jeffery Archer, Chuck Wendig and Margaret Atwood have all famously participated in writing Twitter Fiction celebrated annually.

At the first Twitter fiction festival in March 2014, novelist and editor Goldstein Love stated *‘People say that Twitter is ruining people’s attention — but what if we harnessed that through serialized fiction?’* The first festival was an effort to revive literature and explore the social media site’s capabilities to facilitate dialogue between writers and readers. Audiences were creative – some tweeted the Greek myths in 100 tweets, and other tweeted bits inspired by Italo Calvino’s ‘Italian folktales.’ It’s a good thing to create new literature in this fashion, by reducing Shakespeare to a tweet or Austen to a YouTube video. with libraries closing and art budgets decreasing, perhaps this the best way to get more people engaging with the arts.

Some writers are using Twitter to write complete, self-contained stories. Others are using Twitter to add extra content to longer works published elsewhere or to publish longer works in 280 character serialized excerpts, for instance, Miranda Dickinson used Twitter to get suggestions from her followers on everything plot developments to character names in her latest bestseller *Take a Look at Me Now* and Jennifer Egan’s story ‘Black

Box' appeared as a series of tweets before being published in The New Yorker. Writers are even creating fictional twitter accounts on behalf of their fictional characters. There are now a number of collaborative writing sites that enable people to work together, such as We Are Smarter Than Me, a community book writing project. It all falls under the Twitter fiction umbrella. Though we are not going to get a lot of character development or scene description, Twitter fiction can and does result in some incredibly powerful short stories. Following are few instances, in which the effect relies on the power of what's not being said but revealing their complexity and multiple literary dimensions-

- *Gerald cared for his mom's neglected plants. Grateful, a fern felt compelled to speak, "Thank you." Terrified, he got rid of the plants. @VeryShortStory*
- *The crowd stared, impatient. The magician probed the interior of his hat, finding nothing but a note written in a crude hand: NOT TONIGHT. @Terse Tales*
- *My husband did not believe in ghosts, so I was intrigued, after his funeral, to find him sulking in the attic, too embarrassed to haunt me. @DeadEndFiction*
- *The wolf grins. "Sweet girl, why are you on the nightpath alone?" I smile with teeth, grip my knife under the red cloak. "Come find out." @thaumatrope*
- *When the caveman lay on the stone to sleep, bizarre and wonderful ideas entered his mind before his dreams. Pen-less, he lost them. @Midnightstories*
- *His small town felt too small. So he went to the big city. And he found a lousy job. And a tiny apartment. And moved back to his small town. @arjunbasu*
- *She spent the evening shedding tears concerning some dairy product she had allowed to crash to the floor of her kitchen. Her cat adored her. @motkedapp*
- *In the absence of predators, the species invented marriage, which its members*

could then pride themselves on surviving, year after year- @DawnCorrigan

Authors have already embraced several different styles of writing Twitter fiction, but Writing very short fiction is not a new development. the concept is inspired by what is believed to be a short story written by Ernest Hemingway, challenged to write it in just 6 words. The resulting story "*For sale: baby shoes, never worn,*" is proof that an entire story, from beginning to end can be conveyed in just a few words. In a tribute, Hemingway's quote retweeted as "*For Sale: baby shoes, worn a lot. Please buy these old-ass baby shoes*"—@grayamelia

Twitter fiction is a process of literary distillation, of taking something big and unwieldy and concentrating until it fits on a cellphone screen or in a Twitter stream. it is a test of a writer's skill in condensing a complete narrative or sentiment into an impossibly small word limit. It makes sense then that an incredibly short form like Twitter fiction needs to make every character count in order to tell the best story possible.

Following are some of the main characteristics of twitter fiction writing---

- The automatic time stamp published in every tweet which gives us a sense of immediacy and also provides a permanent link to the entry for easy reference and retrieval.
- Twitter gives users the power to save "favorite tweets" and replying to authors by using the @+username function
- Twitter stories do not have a title, which is an element that provides a focus or completes the meaning of the story
- On the author's profile, all tweets are displayed in reverse chronological order and are distributed that way to his or her network.
- Twitter fiction is classified into or labeled by its authors with certain literary genres which are given new names by combining the name of the different genres with the

name of the application (portmanteau words). Thus, thrillers become twirlers, haikus, twaikus and short stories, twistories or twistlers.

- As an expression of experimental postmodern literature, Twitter fiction shares characteristics such as brevity, multiple meanings, intertextuality, reflecting the very nature of the environment in which it is produced.

It's no surprise, then, to see Twitter giving rise to not just a new, condensed short-form of writing, but also to whole new audiences that teeming it up. A new micro-fandom for micro- twitter literature: twitterature is rising.

Twitterature as a form has goals as varied as the billion individuals that compose its platform. As a marketing vehicle, twitterature can drive established authors to new heights; as a revealing platform, it can catapult undiscovered authors into relevance; as a bite-sized form, it can appeal to world's attention. Twitter is teaching, informing authors new and old, how to reach and entice readers who see art in character-counts as well as characters.

Following are some examples, how writers are celebrating twitter as their ultimate platform for the successful delivery of e-literature content--

- Rick Moody, writer of *Garden State* and *The Ice Storm*, is an example of an author who found a way to enable his print readership by way of Twitter. Moody admitted his story was "absolutely written ground up on Twitter, for Twitter, about Twitter"
- Another example Matt Stewart, by Feeding readers with a new tweet every 15 minutes, he published his novel *The French Revolution* on Twitter.
- The Penguin release "Twitterature" by Aciman and Rensin, summarizes 80 of the "greatest works of western literature" in 20 tweets or less, examples including *Anna Karenina*, all of the *Harry Potters*, and *Macbeth*.

- There are many successful short story writers on Twitter, some of whom have even gone on to publish their work. *@VeryShortStory* is a great example of a writer, Sean Hill, who not only shares his work on Twitter but even crowdsources his creativity from his followers. He explains on his blog: "I ask my Twitter followers to send me nouns. The nouns that inspire me, I use in a very short story that I send out on my *@veryshortstory* Twitter feed. the best trick is getting the readers to use their imagination to fill in the gaps." With over 190,610 followers, Hill had his work published in a book with the same title as his username.
- A search of any of the hashtags or handle used by poets will show, what a tremendous amount of poetry is being shared on Twitter. For e.g. • *@SixWords*, *@writer_Mou_G*, *@SmcankSmc*, *#KitchenLiterature* Others are-- *@thaumatrope* *@Nanoism* *@PicFic*
- For publishing Twitter poetry and promotion of poets. *@poetrybusiness* *@PoetrySociety* *@poetshouse* *@poetswritersinc* are some handles to follow.

Author Tim Parks, believes, " *No art form, exists independently of the conditions in which it is enjoyed*", and so contemporary fiction is going to adopt; in fact, it is already doing so in the art form of twitter. Parks finished by predicting that "the novel of elegant, highly distinct prose, of conceptual delicacy and syntactical complexity, will tend to divide itself up into shorter and shorter sections."

Does constrained writing have any impact on a writer's creativity?

On one side, we might think of the character limit as hampering, but the act of forcing the story into a tight space might open all sorts of possibilities the writer might never have thought of. The restriction on character count has a broadening effect, redefining what to be published in the first place. Writers are not just establishing a new realm

of short-form creativity; also they are inducing some portion of Twitter's worldwide community into their personal readership. Writing a story so short whilst still providing such impact is a work of extreme care. as each word plays a valuable role in the structure of the narrative. What may seem like a quickly-typed Tweet likely took drafting and re-drafting, just as any written work does. Creating Twitter fiction is a good exercise for the writer - a practice in writing succinct, effective sentences. a lot of Twitter fiction authors start with a bigger idea and then work that down into the bite-sized tweet.

In a lot of ways, writing Twitter fiction is the ultimate storytelling process, that forces the writer to convey only what's necessary and only what works. But writing such short fiction is by no means easy. Each word has to be placed with the utmost care. Achieving a satisfying story arc, or any sort of believable character description is challenging. Often, the trick is to leave much of the story out; so that readers fill in the details for themselves. There is no time for scene-setting or preamble; we need to catch the key moment of the story. Not all stories written for Twitter will be successful, but trying to create one can teach us a lot about concise writing and careful word selection. *"Nanoism will always have a 140-character limit. Constraint is the USP of the platform. We're not a Facebook publication for a reason"*. As Ben White @midnightstories tweeted.

Conclusion

The world of literature is entering a golden age of sorts, ripe with innovations that we can't yet fully understand. In the ashes of digital disruption, a contemporary new literary movement is taking shape as people are both consuming and producing information. A form of electronic literature (sometimes digital literature) is taking shape—and it may very well change everything we thought we knew about literature. E-lit is a creative exploration of the word in digital media and now the most contemporary writing is already "born digital". it can be seen in the explosion of interactive children's e-literature for touchscreen devices, as well as the production of multimedia and critical editions of classic literary works, one indicator is the recent

explosion of transmedia storytelling. There are ongoing attempts to establish the definition of e-literature, but whatever definitions we settle on; it's exciting to study an emergent literary form that is constantly evolving beyond established definitions.

With free stories, no trees need to be axed—not for pages or covers or for money to buy them. With an internet connection, any reader with a smart device can now own any piece of work. Today, it's in our hand only to determine whether we are to be considered as an author or not. People are participating massively in writing online fan fiction and creating communities to share their born-digital creations online. They may not even be aware that they are producing something that could be considered electronic literature, or that there's an intellectual and artistic quality to the work they're doing. We can see this with the massive creation and dissemination of image macro memes and kinetic typography videos. Digital technology and the rise in the digital reading culture has allowed authors and publishers many newer creative opportunities to develop 'the book' further and delight readers.

writers are now feeling that electronic literature will become normalized and we'll eventually be able to drop the "electronic" qualifier so that it's just literature. Digital writing is here to stay and that includes writing words that move, that respond to input, that recombine, have generative aspects, or behave as programmed. digital environments are perfect for multidimensional communication in which instead of communicating by producing signs in a single mode, i.e. writing, we can use speech, gestures, facial expression, proximity, and the world around us, we can use, images, video, sound, animation, games, links, touchscreen gestures, and other modes, working together to express ideas.

As literature is gradually breaking away from a standard form, to recognize that lack of perfect structure doesn't mean no literary worth, we need to consider the work like, of Eliot, Hemingway and James Joyce. The fact is that most people do have busy lives and an expectation of short form and immediate entertainment rather than length

and depth. As Scott Hutchins at the Twitter fiction festival, said: 'Useless verbs fall away on Twitter.'

Though there are some huge issues regarding E-literature such as "preserving digital works in the face of our rapidly accelerating world of technology", but it's for sure that sooner or later we'll overcome such problems effectively. Social media may not be 'proper' literature. But it does offer innovative and attractive possibilities for people in terms of expression, creativity, collaboration, and participation.

Thus, we should ask ourselves what likely is the future of fiction? What new forms of written storytelling will this Internet generation desire and which are they already creating? Perhaps it is time for us to reconsider our use of language and expression, what media and creativity are, and our definition of 'proper literature,' in 2019 rather than that of a nostalgic and sentimentalized canon of the past. We are already living a digital world, even if we're unaware of it, but sooner or later our generations will be the witness of such massive literature switch to the possibilities of digital writing. it's inevitable.

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