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Interactive/Digital Literature: Between Qualitative Potential and Terminological Chaos

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Abstract:

Interactive literature is a product of the keen desire to keep up with the various technological advancements witnessed in the 21st century. It has achieved significant resonance within the literary realm, surpassing critical expectations in some literary accomplishments. Therefore, this research aims to explore the realm of interactive text, examine its concept, question parallel terms, and consider whether the terminological chaos is a result of the rapid cognitive explosion of the modern age - the age of technology. Additionally, the research seeks to identify the characteristics that manifest the essence of interactive literature. The research adopted a descriptive methodology based on analytical and inductive mechanisms. Statistical procedures were also employed to comprehend the parallel terminological diversity of interactive literature. Moreover, the research raised several issues, including: What is interactive literature? Can the term "interactive literature" adequately signify the intersection of literature and technology?

Keywords: Interactive literature, digital literature, electronic literature, terminological chaos, accountability, quality possibilities.

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1.Introduction:

When literature transitioned from orality to writing, many of the rhetorical and semantic cues were lost. This transition contributed to igniting creativity and criticism since literature moved from an audible language to a silent language with distinct spaces for writing. However, today, the mode of writing has changed from ink to numbers. Behind the letters, there are numbers that traditional language fails to solve. This requires interaction, which is an integral part of writing fused with technology.

Therefore, it can be said that interactive/digital literature is a product of keeping pace with technological advancements in various cognitive systems and creative fields. It has become a contemporary trend in all arts, following the norms of innovation. Amidst these unavoidable developments, Arabic literature renews itself by carving another path through interactivity, where

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the digital equation becomes a direct communicative medium between the creator and the recipient.

Based on this deliberate challenge and the proportional relationship between literature and the language of numbers, the tempting terminology of interactive literature introduced qualitative debates and terminological alternatives such as digital literature, electronic literature, Facebook literature, and digital literature.

Thus, this research aims to explore the realm of interactive literature, examine its concept, question parallel terms, and consider whether the terminological chaos is a result of the rapid cognitive explosion of the modern age - the age of technology. Additionally, the research seeks to identify the characteristics that manifest the essence of interactive literature.

The research adopted a descriptive methodology based on analytical and inductive mechanisms. Statistical procedures were also employed to comprehend the parallel terminological diversity of interactive literature. Moreover, the research raised several issues, including: What is interactive literature? What are the characteristics that manifest its essence? Can the term "interactive literature" adequately signify the intersection of literature and technology? Does the multiple terminology of interactive literature signify terminological chaos or linguistic richness?

2. In the realm of interactive/digital literature:

The literary text has boldly engaged in the challenges of interactive/digital writing, as it possesses a dynamic, labyrinthine structure that rejects stillness and stability. The mediums through which literary texts are circulated have constantly changed from orality to writing without hesitation. Thus, the literary text is an open structure that embraces experimentation and accommodates the aspirations of baroque writing, which can transform and recreate itself within the realm of technology when the ink realm is on the verge of miscarriage.

This does not mean that literary writing originates from a void or starts from scratch. On the contrary, it constantly disguises itself in molds and colors, disentangling links whenever necessary.

It is like a straight road without signs, changing its course at will without prior notice. Based on this premise, the literary text has formed a creative partnership with technology. As a result, literary writing has changed in form and content. In terms of form, hidden numbers behind the blue screen have replaced ink and paper. In terms of content, digital writing stimulates the internal momentum of both the creator and the recipient. The creator writes with the utmost creativity inspired by their experiences, and the recipient interacts with these creations by writing parallel texts that bridge the gap between them and the creator.

Furthermore, digital writing derives its existence by employing terminologies and expressions born out of the technological revolution of the 21st century. As poet Mustafa Dahia says:

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Emotions of carbon,

Dreams of cardboard,

Written on their pages,

MADE IN USA¹

Digital globalization has shortened distances and brought dimensions closer, leading to the rapid spread of creative achievements and their accessibility to a larger audience. By conducting a simple statistical study on a text by Mustafa Dahia, it was found that the printed text reached no more than fifty readers. However, when the same text was shared by its author on a social media platform, it generated more than 120 comments and around 300 likes (silent texts), with the number continuously increasing from time to time.

These relative numbers revealed" an increase in the level of interaction between the sender and the recipient within the framework of a website. In terms of continuous updates using the optical strip, this turns the production cycle of digital newspapers or websites into an ongoing process over time. On the other hand, the communication between the sender and the recipient is instantaneous, where any text or article can be accompanied by immediate responses and comments at any moment and over time. Previously, printed newspapers used to receive readers' feedback through mail, taking days or weeks.^{2"}

3.The Conceptual Network of Interactive/Digital Literature:

The term interactive/digital literature has resonated widely in cultural and literary circles. It directly refers to harnessing the potential of computers during the creative process. Therefore, the research seeks to introduce several concepts that contribute to the field of interactive literature.

3.1 Concept of Interactive Literature (Littérature interactive):

Interactive literature derives its existence from the interaction of digital media (images, symbols, lighting, engineering), as these elements have become an integral part of the text's structure. Additionally, it involves an interactive relationship that makes the "text a partnership and possession of both the creator and the recipient"³. As the text becomes a shared and publicly owned creation, "the recipient gains a space that equals or exceeds the original creator's space within the text"⁴. Thus, the text has not yet been fully written; it is renewable and changes whenever virtual recipients engage with it.

While literary texts have evolved throughout their long history, transitioning from orality to writing while maintaining their distinctive features, interactive literature differs from that. It can be said that a rupture or transitional phase has occurred, "leading to the emergence of a new literary genre that combines literature and electronics"⁵, as Fatima Al-Breiki states.

The difference is clear between the completed paper literary text that closes itself upon completion, where the role of recipients is to open its closures and reveal hidden semantic focal points. This is unlike the interactive text, which is open-ended and allows recipients to generate alternative and parallel texts to the original.

3.2 Concept of Digital Literature (Littérature numérique):

The transition of literary texts from the narrow paper realm to the open realm of digitization does not transform them into a different genre outside literature. The evolution occurs in the modes of transmission, promotion, appearance, and transformation from one format to another (from writing to cinema, for example). This means that creativity remains purely literary. Alongside these developments and changes, digital justification works to activate literary texts through programs and websites, contributing to the production of endless alternative texts in various forms such as writing, images, videos, silent texts, and likes.

These new creations about the reality of paper writing are produced by the digital space through virtual readers. Therefore, many researchers define digital literature based on the activities of virtual reading. Researcher Rachid Hadou sees digital text as a space that combines digital writing and reading: "The digital text is where we read the writing and write the reading"⁶.

According to Rachid Hadou's perspective, the digital text is dependent on the duality of digital writing and reading, making it a distinct entity. In digital literature, it is not necessary for the reader to be the same as the writer. Often, the reaction differs from the intended effect. When the reader reads the writing, they create a new virtual reading text from an imaginary author. The form of the text is also virtual because reading emerges from the realm of writing and quickly returns to it in a different form. It does not eliminate or erase the original, but rather turns it into a digital equation that accepts multiple solutions, avoiding errors. "This is directly attributed to the multi-modal nature of the digital text, which allows for the utilization of digital programs, links, two-dimensional and three-dimensional images, buttons, and various features, transforming digital literary text into a rebellious, branching entity that challenges traditional linear patterns. It can be read, heard, and seen"⁷.

From the beginning, it is observed that digital literature operates within the framework of links that connect the text to digital communication technology, which prepares and adapts it according to specific programs, ensuring its access to a broader audience of technology users. This led us to discuss the interconnected text (hypertext), which was established by Ted Nelson in 1968, as he described it as "a combination of natural language text with the computer's capabilities for interactive branching or dynamic presentation"⁸.

The hypertext introduced a third element to the communicative process, transforming it from sender/recipient to sender/digital space/imaginary recipient. This indicates that the hypertext is multi-faceted. Some researchers even refer to it as the branching or branching text. "This

figurative term describes a method of presenting information in which text, images, sounds, and actions are interconnected in a complex, non-linear network. This allows the user of the text (formerly known as the reader) to browse through related topics within the interactive network, as demonstrated in the educational context. For example, when the branching text uses the word "river," the digital space can expand its semantic scope within the contextual framework. If the context is related to fertility, the background of the branching text may display an image of the Nile River, or the word "river" may appear magnified or in different colors. Clicking on it could lead to images and videos that help reveal the intended meaning or stimulate the momentum of the recipients, bringing out their maximum creative expression.

4. Characteristics of Interactive Literature:

Every literary genre has distinguishing features that highlight its uniqueness and differentiate it from other forms of literature and art. Therefore, it was necessary to explore the intricacies of interactive literature in order to identify its distinctive characteristics. The first of these features is evident in the digital writing present within a digital space, "where the text is equipped with programming and presentation files that allow the reader to access and restructure the text according to their preferences without compromising its content"¹⁰.

Interactive literature challenges the classical concept of regulated writing and opens the realm of digital writing, which is based on a virtual version that changes and transforms according to the readers' aspirations without losing its identity. It is like a chameleon, perceived differently by each individual, but not randomly so, as it has a justified color and a defined essence.

Interactive literature is characterized by its composition of various contrasting elements such as images, symbols, shapes, colors, etc. However, its nature and structure remain intact. It is a creative space built on the idea of coexistence and interaction between the literary and electronic domains. As a result, interactive texts can seamlessly transform into electronic programs.

Computing: One of the characteristics of interactive literature is its reliance on mathematical and algorithmic equations that control the activation of its textual elements. It also incorporates a "technique and aesthetics subject to computational and mathematical digitization"¹¹. This ensures the coherence and harmony of textual units in terms of writing style, size, color, movement within the digital space, and all aspects related to the background of writing.

Interactivity: Interactivity is the essence of interactive literature," and it is closely related to the presence of multiple interactive(...) components that form the basis of digital text, hypertext, or branching text¹²". These interactive components give rise to two types of interaction: internal interaction, resulting from virtual multimedia that allows the literary text to function as an intertwined collection of texts (writing, images, sound, symbols, etc...), and external interaction, arising from the interactive communication between the virtual creator and recipient.

Immediacy: Immediacy refers to the temporal connection between the creator and the recipient when the text is directly presented on the blue screen. Immediacy creates a sense of excitement or motivation for interaction. "For the author, it allows them to engage with their readers, receive quick responses, or engage in critical discussions that evaluate their ideas and writing style¹³".

Dissemination and Inclusivity: Interactive literature does not require printing presses or exhibitions for promotion. Instead, it relies on high-speed internet flow. Optical fibers enable the text to reach a wide audience, regardless of their language, as the digital space provides a high level of literary translation, which activates the reception process. This leads to another advantage of interactive literature, which is inclusivity. It encompasses two meanings: first, the comprehensive reach of interactive literary text to various readers, irrespective of their languages, and secondly, "expanding the concept of textuality to include anything that has the ability to influence the recipient artistically and evoke specific emotions¹⁴".

5. Questioning Parallel Terminologies of Interactive Literature:

To overcome the terminological issue, it is necessary to meet several conditions, including statistical analysis, investigation, and sorting in order to obtain the precise term that serves its purpose and facilitates the critic's discourse when studying the literary text. Terminology acts as a key that allows smooth access to the literary field.

Literary fields do not provide separate entrances to their worlds. This directly reflects the terminological chaos experienced by the Arabic terminology system. The concepts dedicated to these fields are burdened with numerous parallel terminologies, such as "visual literature, digital literature, electronic literature, hypertext, algorithmic literature, robotic literature, programmed literature, computer literature, logartemic literature, media literature, web literature, internet writing, Facebook writing, screen literature"¹⁵, and many more.

Interactive literature has experienced an explosion of multiple and overlapping terminologies, hinting at linguistic looseness with unpredictable consequences. Arab writers and critics are still in a state of shock caused by the term and subject of interactive literature. This is evident in the words of Dr. Azaddin Al-Manasra: "We Arabs are living in a phase of astonishment, in a transitional period where the paper clashes with the electronic, the old confronts the new. Therefore, confusion, astonishment, acceptance, and extreme satisfaction are characteristics of this transitional phase"¹⁶.

Therefore, the research aims to identify the emerging, alternative, parallel, and commonly used terms for interactive literature and examine whether they represent terminological chaos or linguistic richness.

Among the terms that have been used to refer to interactive literature without fully capturing its essence, we find "electronic literature" and "computer literature." These terms have primarily emerged due to technological advancements. However, their primary function is to digitally store

literary texts for easy access and facilitate specific information searches. The transformation of literature from paper-based to electronic or computer-based does not make what is commonly referred to as electronic literature equivalent to interactive literature. While the former is a natural consequence of technological progress, the latter has contributed to the activation and development of technology." It is not merely a paper-based text that has entered the realm of technology; rather, it is a distinct form of text that has grown and evolved within an environment. If it is removed from this environment, its distinctiveness is lost(...) Interactive literature is, on one hand, a product of human practice, and on the other hand, it represents the beginning of a new literary practice. This is not only because it employs new and diverse media that differ from traditional practices but also because it opens up its production and reception to non-verbal signs, which become integral to its overarching organizational structure. Thus, it forms a multi-modal text¹⁷".

There are other terms suggested by critics as alternatives to interactive literature, but we can only exclude them as they do not accurately represent it. For instance:

- "Digital literature" (Littérature digital): It is known that "digital" refers to a touch-based operating system used in advanced electronic devices such as phones, cameras, and televisions. Hence, there is a significant difference between the term "digital" and the term "numérique." This terminological discrepancy falls within the realm of literal translation issues.

- "Robotic literature" (Littérature robotique), "technological literature" (Littérature technologique), and "programmed literature" (Littérature programmée): These terms carry connotations unrelated to interactive literature. They add a sense of preparedness and limit its effectiveness, as if interactive literature is merely an automated product directed by the push of a button.

- "Media literature" (Informatique Littérature): This term refers solely to the programs and processes carried out by a computer, such as writing, editing, and printing. Consequently, it intersects, as beautifully stated by Jamil Hamdawi, with "natural literature, which relies on linguistic mediation or ordinary writing"¹⁸. Moreover, the terminological combination of media literature and realistic literature reflects the literature directed towards the audience, expressing their concerns within the framework of committed literature.

- "Visual literature" (Littérature illustrée): Interactive literature encompasses two types of images: a traditional type that has been part of literature since Al-Jahiz defined poetry as "a form of fabric and a genre of depiction"¹⁹, and another type known as digital images resulting from technological advancements, which have accompanied interactive literature to the extent that they have merged together.

Therefore, the term "literature of images" falls short in accurately representing interactive literature from several aspects. Firstly, the term "image" carries connotations that have been

deeply ingrained in literature since ancient times. Thus, it is difficult to surpass these associations in a short period. Additionally, interactive literature is not limited to digital images alone; it encompasses other mediums such as symbols and icons.

Alternative terms that have gained popularity include "digital literature" and "interactive literature." The term "digital literature" has gained recognition due to its association with texts created on computers. On the other hand, "interactive literature" implies that communication and interaction between the author and virtual recipient occur through a computer or internet-connected device.

Some critics, including Dr. Fatima Al-Bariki, have attempted to consolidate various terms without sufficient scientific and objective presentation. For instance, she states, "The subtle differences between the terms: digital literature, technological literature, and electronic literature are insignificant. The term 'interactive literature' should encompass all these terms"²⁰. This approach overlooks the nuanced distinctions between these terms.

Other suggested terms include "hypertext literature" (Littérature Hypertexte), "which refers to diverse forms and genres of texts and carries the characteristic of branching, indicating differentiation and dispersion from a single source. However, interactive literature emerges from the interaction and collaboration of multiple digital media, including writing, images, ²¹" symbols, and illumination...

Another term is "hyperfiction" (Littérature hyperfiction), proposed by Dr. Nabil Ali. Although he does not provide a clear rationale for using this term, "he defines it as a style that allows readers multiple ways to navigate internal relationships within the text, freeing them from the linear constraints of traditional text. It enables readers to branch out from any point within the text to previous or subsequent points. Furthermore, readers can annotate the text, draw conclusions, index it according to their preferences, and establish connections between various passages that they perceive as synonymous or related"²².

It is evident that Dr. Nabil Ali's exploration of the term "branching text" expands beyond the proposed terminological issues. "He sees the branching text or interactive literature as a new literary stage that transcends previous stages, creating a significant break from them that has not been explicitly acknowledged."²³

The concept of branching text has successfully penetrated electronic environments, marking a distinctive qualitative leap. "It has transformed into a system for storing various forms of information, such as images, texts, and sounds(...), allowing direct access to them and other associated information within the file"²⁴.

The unrestricted interplay between technology and literature has transformed the branching text into a networked textual system that surpasses digital linear writing. Interactive literature is no longer confined to a mere translation of traditional blue ink writing into its digital form. "It has

evolved into a gelatinous medium that incorporates external effects such as images, sound, motion, links, and colors through electronic programs²⁵".

The problematic nature of the term "interactive literature" stems from an artistic and critical experience that has not fully unfolded or established its principles. This can be attributed to two factors:

Firstly, the plethora of concepts and ideas formulated for interactive literature or digital literature viewed as an enticing term that writers and critics pursued without fully grasping its essence. This is due to the rapid technological advancements and the dynamic nature of media and communication spaces. New technologies often render previous ones obsolete. For example, where are the chat rooms we used in the late 1990s compared to the realms of Facebook and TikTok? Furthermore, interactive literature has evolved alongside traditional literature, "and the digital transformation in the realm of imagination is not a rupture but rather a shift in the literary question itself. It transitions from the direct product of the author to the reader and from dealing with familiar narrative language as the core of textual action to considering it as just one element among new linguistic components that operate according to the logic, mechanisms, and expressive methods of programming languages.²⁶"

The second factor depends on the validity of the hypothesis regarding the consciousness of digital interactive literary experimentation itself. It is contingent upon the terminological diversity found in the field of interactive literature. "In the United States, the term "hypertext" is used, while in Europe, "numérique" and "interactive" are employed. In French, the term "informatique" emerged to encompass various practices that have emerged from the relationship between literature, computers, and information technology²⁷".

If interactive literature, which has Western origins, has witnessed terminological diversity that reflects different perspectives, aspirations, and challenges, it implies that the problematic nature of the term "interactive literature" in contemporary Arabic criticism is a valid issue. This is evident in the production of multiple Arabic terms that parallel Western terms for interactive literature. Therefore, it is neither fair nor objective for Dr. Fatima Al-Bariki to make a harsh judgment on Arab literature by stating, "Technological literature is still largely unknown among Arabs"²⁸.

Arabic literature, without flattery, is characterized by its dynamism and ability to adapt to literary innovations, regardless of their nature and level of development. However, what Arab literature lacks is the ability to overcome its challenges. This is due to the fragmented efforts of Arabic terminologists and their individual tendencies, which hinder reaching a comprehensive terminological consensus or, at the very least, agreeing on a minimum number of terms that serve the intended purpose. For example, "Western terminologists agreed on terms such as "electronic literature," "digital literature," or "interactive literature." The use of the symbol (or) emphasizes

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that the definition of the term is no longer a problem for literature practitioners. Any of these terms can be used interchangeably, and the specifications remain the same for each term.^{29"}

6.Conclusion:

The research, after analysis and discussion, has reached a set of results that we present as follows:

Literary writing has infiltrated the realm of digitization, achieving a qualitative leap that surpasses the language of ink as much as it surpasses the technology itself. The development witnessed by interactive literature is not limited to a specific form (such as short stories, poetry, novels, etc.), but also includes the development of cinematography that produces illusory images at a rate of three images per second. This is evidence, from another perspective, of the intersection between literature and technology. As we have seen, both strive to renew the form and transcend the norm, regardless of its shape and type. Therefore, the integration of literature into technology has achieved what is referred to as the non-satisfaction with a reference model, but rather the demolition and reconstruction according to a different framework that is often unrelated to previous creative achievements.

If interactive literature is considered an institution, then it is incumbent upon the reader to possess the terminologies of this institution. This means being precise in using the accurate terms that enable proper and smooth access to the field of interactive literature. Any terminological laxity may lead to serious risks, especially considering that interactive literature is a fluid, branching, and interconnected genre. It is formed by multiple linguistic and non-linguistic media, and these intertwined media may transform into electronic programs as a result of their interaction.

As for the terminological issue, interactive literature has witnessed a remarkable multiplicity of terms, whether in the Arab or Western context. The applied study revealed the aspirations of the Western terminological project, which produced terms that serve as key landmarks for interactive literature. On the other hand, the focus of the Arab terminological project remained on producing more alternative terms for interactive literature. This has led to terminological chaos that hinders the emergence of a consensus and prevents agreement on a minimal set of terms that serve the intended purpose. This is evident in the varying titles of books and conferences dedicated to interactive literature, such as "Challenges of Interactive Literature" or "The Concept of Interactive Literature: Between Theory and Practice," and so on.

-Jamal Hamdawi: Digital Literature Between Theory and Application.

-Ibrahim Ahmed Malhem: Literature and Technology.

-Omar Zarfawi: Blue Writing, An Introduction to Interactive Literature.

-Hijazi Mustafa: Cultural Siege Between Satellite Channels and Fundamentalists Call.

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-Yaqteen Saeed: From Text to Hypertext.

-Al-Munasira Az-Zein: Comparative Intertextuality, Towards an Interactive Spider Approach.

-Hossam Al-Khatib: Literature, Technology, and the Bridge of Branching Text.

-Mohamed Ashweika: The Iconic Human.

International Conferences:

-Digital Literature in the Arab World, Challenges of Creativity and the Question of Reception, 08 May 1945 University - Guelma.

-Interactive Text Between Creativity and Criticism, Abbas Laghrour University - Khenchela.

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