

The Author and the Recipient in the Digital Space: A Critical Perspective in Light of Interactive Literature

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Abstract:

This paper investigates the structural and aesthetic transformations that have affected the duality (author/receiver) in light of the emergence of interactive literature, where the text is no longer a closed linguistic entity but rather a networked, transmedia space. The study seeks to interrogate classical critical assumptions, foremost among them "the death of the author," in order to trace how the author shifts from the authority of the "sole creator" to the role of the "technical architect," alongside the reconfiguration of the reader's identity, who has moved from a consuming reader to a "participatory author" contributing to meaning-making through the probabilistic pathways enabled by hypertextual writing. The research examines the impact of the digital medium in breaking traditional hierarchies and transforming the act of reading into an immersive, negotiative experience that redefines literariness according to the demands of "digitalization." This, in turn, necessitates that literary criticism invent procedural tools capable of keeping pace with this shift from linear text to interactive text, and from interpretive reading to navigational practice.

Keywords: interactive literature, digital space, death of the author, active reader, hypertext.

Introduction:

Contemporary aesthetic consciousness faces major conceptual challenges due to the growing dominance of the digital medium over the core mechanisms of human creativity, as literature is no longer merely a linguistic practice confined to the printed page, but has become a networked entity that breathes through algorithms and codes. This transition from a "culture of ink" to a "culture of the digital" has caused a seismic shift in the foundations of critical theory, requiring a re-examination of the assumptions that have long governed the relationship between the parties of the creative process. We are thus confronted with a new textual reality that transcends linearity and pure materiality, establishing a virtual space in which the distances between the creative self and the reading self dissolve, thereby necessitating critical approaches capable of probing the depths of this "fluid" text that resists closure upon a single meaning or final reference.

The seriousness of the digital transformation lies in its impact on the very essence of "literariness," where rhetoric is no longer tied solely to verbal deviation, but has become linked to the interactive mechanisms offered by the technological medium to the receiver. This shift toward "interactivity" reproduces classical conceptions of textual time and space: time is transformed from chronological succession into simultaneous moments of navigation and discovery, while space shifts from the confined page into an infinite virtual field of hyperlinks. This interplay between the technical and the aesthetic produces a "hybrid" text that breaks the isolation of individual writing and opens the door to multiple technical voices contributing to the construction of the digital imaginary, making reading an immersive sensory experience that goes beyond traditional mental interpretation to include physical movement and user interaction.

The concept of the "death of the author," as theorized by Roland Barthes within structuralism, remained for decades confined to linguistic deconstruction; however, the emergence of interactive literature has given this concept a tangible material dimension beyond its critical metaphor. In the digital space, the physical author disappears while their presence persists in the architecture of links, and the authority of meaning-making shifts from the center to the periphery, where the reader becomes a partner in constructing the narrative rather than a mere consumer of it. This absence of a central creative subject establishes a form of "textual democracy," in which meaning becomes the product of an ongoing negotiation between readerly intention and software design, thereby redefining creative identity as a participatory act that transcends individuality toward horizons of shared knowledge and collaborative authorship characteristic of the present age.

The reconfiguration of the reader's identity in light of interactive literature represents one of the deepest transformations in the history of aesthetic reception, as the reader shifts from a passive recipient of meaning to a "user" capable of altering the trajectories and outcomes of the text. This transformation is not merely nominal but functional, as the reader is now required to possess a technical awareness parallel to their linguistic awareness in order to decode the digital text. The immersive interactive experience creates a form of identification between reader and text, where mouse clicks and screen movements become part of the narrative fabric, granting the receiver the status of an "actual author" who does not merely interpret what exists, but actively generates what is possible and potential within the dense network of hyperlinks.

These structural transformations call for a comprehensive critical reassessment of the methodological tools employed in Arabic criticism when approaching digital literary production, away from both technological fascination and traditional rejection. Criticism, in engaging with interactive literature, must become an "interdisciplinary" practice that combines the aesthetics of language with digital semiotics, recognizing that the text in virtual space is a living entity that never remains stable. Hence, there is a need to deconstruct the mechanisms of the digital medium as an active participant in the creative process rather than a neutral tool, as digital materiality imposes its own logic on the creative imagination and directs the reader's taste toward new modes of aesthetic consumption based on speed, condensation, and multimedia multiplicity. This, in turn, transforms the nature of literary pleasure and its epistemological functions.

This complex interweaving between the withdrawing authority of the author and the intruding authority of the reader within the digital space raises a central problem concerning the nature of the interactive relationship between the two parties under the dominance of the technological medium. This problem crystallizes in questioning the boundaries between authorship and reception in interactive literature, and how digitalization has transformed the "death of the author" from a philosophical notion into an operational reality that grants the reader the power to engineer meaning. Can we speak of an aesthetic autonomy of the digital text given its constant dependence on programming codes, or are we witnessing the emergence of a new creative paradigm that fuses creator and receiver into a single entity: the "interactive text" that transcends disciplinary and critical boundaries?

1. The Decentering of Creative Centrality and the Engineering of the Digital Text:

The problem of authorship in the digital age is manifested through a radical transformation in the concept of the "creative self," which no longer monopolizes the authority of absolute meaning within the textual space, but has instead become a partner in a productive process in which language

intertwines with programming. This shift compels us to reread literary history from a technological perspective, where the transition from paper to screen is not merely a material shift, but an epistemological transformation that renders writing a rhizomatic act refusing closure upon a single meaning. In this context, "hypertext represents an epistemological rupture with the notions of unity and linear coherence that dominated the print age"

¹, thereby opening wide horizons for endless deconstructive readings, where the text becomes capable of growth and expansion through multiple agents. This dismantles the idea of a single, original work and transforms the author into a programmer who engineers possibilities rather than narrating fixed certainties characteristic of the classical novel.

The nature of the digital text imposes on the creator a new language that transcends verbal rhetoric to encompass the rhetoric of links and media, thereby producing a complex entanglement between the technical and the aesthetic within discourse. This interweaving redefines the creative identity of the author, who voluntarily relinquishes the authority of dictation to exercise a subtler authority of algorithmic guidance, as "navigating hypertext redefines the relationship between the creative self and the reading self according to a logic of partnership rather than guardianship"². This transformation requires criticism to develop aesthetic criteria that do not limit themselves to linguistic analysis, but extend to the mechanisms of hyperlinks and multimedia as essential components of the creative process characterized by fluidity and instability. Thus, authorship becomes a technical adventure par excellence, requiring programming skills and artistic visions that merge sound and image into a unified expressive field.

Textual fluidity in virtual space poses a real challenge to the concept of continuity, as the text becomes a living entity that changes with each act of reading and interaction performed by the user on the interface. The author, in this context, does not write a finished text but establishes a creative "protocol" that allows for the generation of countless texts, making it clear that "liberating the text from the constraints of paper is also liberating the author from the necessity of linear narration, and granting the receiver the chance to manipulate temporal structure"³. This dynamic produces a form of transboundary literariness in which absolute authorial authority is replaced by the authority of the program that defines the rules of the game for both parties, paving the way for the emergence of a "total text" that transcends traditional linguistic barriers and addresses the senses through integrated visual and auditory configurations.

The absence of the physical materiality of the text leads to the dissolution of the book as a closed unit and opens the field to continuously interactive texts that engage unpredictably with external contexts. This absence strengthens the idea of the disappearance of the creative self within the broader creative practice, as the interactive text "does not belong to its original creator as much as it belongs to the moment of interaction performed by the user through clicking links"⁴. This understanding raises critical challenges regarding intellectual property in the age of digital commons and participatory authorship, dissolving the boundaries between producer and consumer and establishing a form of "collective creativity" that represents the technological culmination of literature, where aesthetic value becomes tied to the ability to generate dynamic interaction between fragmented textual components in cyberspace.

The critical engagement with this type of literature requires deep awareness of the mechanisms of the technological medium, as the author here writes not with ink but in the language of algorithms that direct the reader's emotional responses and determine their reading

paths. This shift in the substance of literature reveals that the digital text is a structure that breathes through interaction, and without the reader's act it remains inert code devoid of meaning in the absence of the "reading eye." Thus, the author becomes the primary instigator of action rather than the final producer of meaning, transforming writing into an open experimental practice where the subjective and objective, the technical and aesthetic, intertwine in a creative scene that reflects the complexities of the digital age.

The new identity of the author cannot be separated from the networked environment in which the text grows, where "paper space" is replaced by "virtual space" unbounded by geographical or linguistic borders. This global openness transforms the author into a designer of virtual worlds that transcend tangible reality and establish a new reality in which meaning circulates through intensified visual and auditory media. This requires literary criticism to invent procedural tools that keep pace with the shift from linear text to interactive text, and from traditional interpretive reading to navigational practice based on "structured wandering" within the dense web of hyperlinks designed with high technical precision that mirrors the complexity of the human mind in processing digital information flows.

The relationship between author and text in virtual space is one of continuous generation rather than final ownership, as the sanctity of individual authorship is dismantled in favor of collective action. This shift establishes a new critical perspective that sees interactive literature as the culmination of the transition from a culture of text to a culture of the reader, where the aura of the transcendent author collapses and the authority of the user emerges. Thus, we are confronted with a unique creative experience that redefines "literariness" according to the demands of digitalization, opening new horizons for rigorous academic inquiry into the dialectical relationship between human and machine in producing aesthetic and value-laden meaning in a rapidly transforming technological world.

2.Reception Strategies and Transformations of the Reader-User:

The problem of reading in digital space emerges from the fact that it is no longer a passive response to pre-structured linguistic sequences, but has become a navigational practice requiring technical awareness parallel to aesthetic awareness, where reading and construction are intertwined simultaneously. The receiver in interactive literature finds themselves facing a "hypertext that obliges them to make decisive choices determining narrative direction and meaning generation"⁵. This immersion transforms the reader from an external observer into an organic participant in shaping the narrative, making the text a potential existence realized only through a mouse click. This radical shift reflects a rebellion against traditional linearity that confined the reader to interpretive positions, while digital reception becomes an exercise of freedom within a tightly structured system of links that open infinite possibilities, necessitating a rethinking of reception theory to include procedural dimensions.

The reader in the digital environment transcends being a mere consumer of meaning to merge with the role of co-author, as multimedia tools grant them the ability to manipulate temporal and spatial structures of the literary work in ways not possible in the print era. In this context, the concept of the "user" emerges as a substitute for the traditional reader, since "the act of reading in virtual space is a blend of mental interpretation and physical movement that generates unique textual paths"⁶. This implies that a single text may produce contradictory reading experiences depending on the entry points chosen by the receiver. This plurality obliges

digital criticism to trace the reader's trajectory within the labyrinth of the text, considering the active receiver as one who rewrites the text at the moment of reading, transforming digital silence into living discourse. Thus, readerly authority in interactive space extends beyond interpretation to structural creation.

Aesthetics of reception in digital literature are based on the principle of total immersion, where the receiver loses the distance between self and fictional world due to direct intervention in narrative events through technological mediation. This form of reception produces what may be called productive reading, as "the interactive text does not present a finished truth but an open workshop managed by the reader according to their own tendencies and perspectives"⁷. This creates new epistemic responsibility concerning how to guide the reader without restricting creative freedom. Digital devices, with their audio-visual and kinetic capacities, transform reading into a multisensory experience where words become visual icons eliciting immediate responses beyond traditional cognition, reinforcing the idea that the receiver is the true driver of the creative process.

The digital reader is a "trans-systemic subject," moving from textual level to mediating level, and from linguistic interpretation to semiotic interpretation of digital signs and hyperlinks. This mobility grants interactive text its existential legitimacy, as without user navigation the text remains a dead entity, since "interactive reading breaks the isolation between text and reader, making them partners in continuous creation of virtual reality"⁸. This restores reception theories but with a material dimension manifested in selecting paths and clicking icons, transforming reading from a contemplative act into a productive kinetic act that shapes the final structure of the literary work in its fluid form.

Reading strategies in digital literature are characterized by fragmentation and selection, as the reader does not follow a linear path from beginning to end but constructs their own trajectory through "navigational practice" based on intuition and technical curiosity. This reflects the contemporary condition of information overload and dispersed attention, where "the digital reader becomes a hunter of meanings within a forest of overlapping links and media that simultaneously distract and reassemble attention"⁹. This creates a pleasure of discovery and surprise, turning the literary text into a space of structured wandering that entices the reader to search for the "absent meaning" behind hyperlinks, fundamentally transforming reading habits and aesthetic expectations.

The digital receiver is a "potential author," possessing the keys to enter and exit the text at will, granting them unprecedented evaluative authority. This appears in their ability to add comments or modify pathways in participatory texts, making the text "a constantly open structure that never achieves stability or completion, as it remains subject to continuous updating and real-time interaction"¹⁰. This merging of reading and writing produces a unified identity: the "creative user," who rejects traditional critical authority and seeks to construct their own world beyond the historical author's centrality. This places criticism before the challenge of following these constantly mutating texts.

It may be said that interactive literature has rewritten the reading contract, where the reader is no longer merely an "interpreter" but a physical and cognitive "actor." This transformation requires critical methodologies capable of analyzing "reader behavior" within the text, not only textual structure itself, as "the active receiver is the only guarantee for the survival of literature in the technological age, being the bridge between code and meaning"¹¹. Thus, we move from

text criticism to interaction criticism, from aesthetics of product to aesthetics of practice, opening broad horizons for interdisciplinary studies combining literature, cognitive psychology, and digital communication sciences.

3.The Dialectic of the Death of the Author and the Emergence of the Digital Self:

The discussion of the "death of the author" in the context of interactive literature necessitates a critical revisiting of Roland Barthes' propositions, yet from a technological perspective that sees the disappearance of the individual author as an opportunity for the emergence of a "collective author" hidden behind software systems. In the digital space, the author dies as a singular voice only to be reborn as an architect of a participatory semiotic system. Thus, the death of the author in the "virtual space is not a biological absence but rather a displacement of its function from dictation to technical construction"¹². This shift grants the text a greater autonomy, making meaning the outcome of interaction between the machine, the reader, and the code, thereby reinforcing the idea that the digital text is a "text without a proprietor" once released into the networked space, where its real life begins beyond the intentions of its original creator.

The relationship between the digital author and their text is simultaneously one of separation and connection: the author establishes the rules but does not control the final outcomes generated by user interaction. This contradiction embodies the peak of "textual democracy" envisioned by post-structuralist criticism, where the author is transformed from a god-like controller of narrative destinies into a facilitator of creative communication between reader and machine. This leads to the fragmentation of centrality and the distribution of creative responsibility. The digital self of the author becomes a "fragmented subject" dispersed across links and media, accessible only through tracing its technical decisions within the system. This transforms biographical criticism into an "algorithmic criticism" that seeks the author's intellectual structure through the logic of the program they designed.

The author's authority in interactive texts oscillates between presence and absence: present in the structure of links, yet absent in each individual reading experience. This elusive absence reproduces the idea that "the literary text is a continuous communicative process that does not end with writing but begins with the reader's first entry into the interface"¹³. This reinforces the notion of the death of the traditional author in favor of the "functional author." Here, the creative self dissolves into programming language, transforming from a "guardian of meaning" into a "generator of possibility," aligning with the aims of interactive criticism in de-sacralizing the creative act and turning it into a shared everyday practice that breaks elite monopolies over literature and opens participation to the masses in shaping the digital collective imagination.

The decentering of authorship in the digital space inevitably leads to the disappearance of the "central author" and the emergence of "texts without fathers," proliferating through copying, linking, and modification. This condition raises profound questions about creative identity: if the text is "an open structure that never stabilizes because it is subject to continuous updating and real-time interaction"¹⁴, then who bears responsibility for its aesthetic or ethical value? The answer lies in viewing the digital author as a "potential author" and the reader as an "actual author." This exchange of roles gives interactive literature its disruptive power against fixed and traditional structures, making the "death of the author" a productive condition that enables

the birth of constantly renewed texts that do not die with their creators but live through the vitality of the platforms that host them.

The "digital self" manifests itself in the author's ability to conceal behind the "graphical interface," transforming writing into a cinematic or programming act that requires awareness of visual and auditory aesthetics. This transformation leads us to recognize that "digital creativity is the product of a collective mind involving the author, programmer, and reader, under the umbrella of the mediating system that organizes this encounter"¹⁵. This reinforces the erosion of individuality in favor of institutional or networked creation. The author in this era becomes a "hybrid subject" combining artistic sensibility and technical intelligence, requiring a new form of interdisciplinary criticism that does not limit itself to language but analyzes image and code as active components in the absence of the traditional author and the presence of a dominant technological self.

The fluidity of digital text prevents the existence of a "final version" of the literary work, deepening the crisis of authorship as control over the product is lost once it is published. This loss is the reverse side of textual freedom: the author dies as the sole owner of truth but lives through "links that grant the reader the illusion of absolute sovereignty"¹⁶, a sovereignty that legitimizes interactive literature in the contemporary age. The digital author is fully aware that their text will be altered, interpreted, and modified by users, and they embrace this "functional death" as it guarantees dissemination, interaction, and continuity within a digital environment that does not tolerate static or closed texts.

In light of the above, the "death of the author" in the digital space is not the end of creativity but the emergence of a new participatory mode of production that transcends individual boundaries. This emergence of the digital self reflects a shift in aesthetic values from "fixed beauty" to "interactive beauty," and from the "author-god" to the "author-engineer." This critical vision confirms that "interactive literature has restored the reader as the true creator of meaning, thus ending the era of textual authoritarianism of the author"¹⁷, and inaugurating a new era of creative freedom that breathes through technological mediation and thrives on continuous interaction between creative and reading selves in an infinite virtual space.

4. Aesthetics of the Digital Medium and the Challenges of Contemporary Criticism:

The digital medium imposes its own logic on the creative process, as the dominance of verbal language recedes in favor of the language of "code" and multimedia elements that form the material substrate of interactive texts. This does not mean marginalizing literature, but rather transforming it into part of a complex system in which human intention intersects with the technical capabilities of the device. Thus, "the digital medium is not merely a channel for transmitting meaning, but a structural agent contributing to the formation and direction of the artistic vision"¹⁸. This leads to the fragmentation of centrality and the distribution of aesthetic authority among programmer, text, and receiver, producing semantic fluidity where the text becomes an open structure that resists traditional genre classifications and instead constructs its identity through the integration of writing, image, and code into a hybrid textual form that challenges both critic and author.

The medium's authority is manifested in its ability to impose certain perceptual pathways through pre-designed hyperlinks, creating a form of constrained freedom for the reader. This tension between readerly intention and textual design reconstructs the literary space as a

technological field, where the text shifts from a fixed structure to "a probabilistic space of multiple reading paths"¹⁹. This openness gives interactive literature its aesthetic value. The digital text, in this sense, is a "hybrid" structure that resists stability and requires criticism to move beyond static descriptive methods toward dynamic approaches that recognize the digital interface as an aesthetic element equal in importance to metaphor, where icons function as condensed semiotic signs that compress interpretive distance.

The interweaving of human and machine in literary production necessitates a redefinition of "literariness," no longer confined to rhetorical language alone but dependent on the text's ability to generate interactive engagement. In the virtual space, "digital text represents the culmination of the shift from a culture of text to a culture of the reader, where the mask of the transcendent author falls away"²⁰. This means that creative value lies in the "interactive capacity" provided by the technological system. The dominance of technology does not marginalize humanity but reveals that "digital creativity is the product of a collective mind involving author, programmer, and reader under a mediating system"²¹, reinforcing the collapse of literary centrality in favor of a network of intersecting relations that redefine art as a global participatory act beyond linguistic and material boundaries.

Literary criticism faces a major challenge in approaching a text that has no stable physical form, but is instead fluid and constantly changing through reading and interaction. This requires the invention of new methodological tools. The critic must become as much a "technical expert" as a "literary connoisseur," since "interactive criticism is a dynamic practice that traces meaning in the gaps between word, link, and digital symbol"²². This demands an interdisciplinary literacy combining computer science and aesthetics. The contemporary critic is no longer an external judge but an "insightful reader" uncovering the hidden mechanisms governing the reader-text relationship, where value is determined not only by linguistic quality but also by the efficiency of the interactive system and its capacity to generate multiple and unexpected meanings.

Modern critical perspectives increasingly focus on the "aesthetics of absence," where the physical author disappears while their technical trace remains, and the traditional reader disappears in favor of the digital user. This creates a space of constant experimentation, as "interactive literature is the true laboratory of postmodernity, where grand narratives are dismantled in favor of fragments and branching paths"²³. This requires flexible and evolving critical approaches. Criticism becomes an exploration of unrealized possibilities and an analysis of how users respond to visual stimuli, treating the digital text as a boundless body and criticism as the mapping of temporary routes in a constantly shifting space, opening new horizons beyond traditional anthropocentric frameworks.

The fluidity of meaning in interactive texts renders interpretation an endless process, intertwining the text with parallel texts and external links, thereby fragmenting thematic unity. This fragmentation reflects the structure of contemporary digital consciousness, which rejects totalizing narratives in favor of detail and multiplicity. In this context, "digital interaction is an exercise of freedom within a tightly structured system of links that open infinite possibilities"²⁴. This necessitates redefining textual rhetoric to include "medium rhetoric." Literary criticism must now recognize technology as a genuine creative partner, and that the aesthetics of interactive literature are inseparable from interface design, usability, and link architecture concepts absent from traditional critical vocabularies.

Interactive criticism ultimately seeks to construct a comprehensive theory that accounts for the deep transformations in textuality and the shifting roles of creator and receiver in virtual space. This theory must be grounded in the principle that "digitization is not merely a new container for literature, but a fundamental revolution in the nature of literature and its modes of perception and circulation within networked society"²⁵. This calls for academic collaboration to establish rigorous and adaptable critical standards capable of keeping pace with technological acceleration. The future of criticism lies in understanding the "rhetoric of the hyperlink" and its mechanisms, recognizing that interactive literature has restored the reader as the true creator of meaning, ending the era of authorial textual dictatorship and opening expansive horizons for human creativity mediated by contemporary technology.

Conclusion:

Based on the critical approaches presented above, which have sought to interrogate the author/receiver binary within the digital space, it can be stated that interactive literature is no longer merely a shift in the medium of writing, but rather a comprehensive re-engineering of aesthetic consciousness and literary function. This research has revealed a fundamental displacement in textual power centers, where the absolute centrality once held by the traditional author has dissolved in favor of a complex network of interactions in which both the technological medium and the user actively participate on equal terms. The main findings of this study can be summarized as follows:

The concept of the "death of the author" has shifted from a philosophical-linguistic notion to a technical-operational one, where the author disappears as a referential authority and reappears as an architect of a probabilistic system.

The emergence of the identity of the "co-author" or "active user," which has led to the breakdown of traditional hierarchies between text producer and consumer, transforming reading into a productive act.

The displacement of "literariness" from its purely rhetorical and linguistic level to a level of "interactional rhetoric," where aesthetic value becomes dependent on the efficiency of links and multimedia elements.

The establishment of the "hypertext" as a creative reality characterized by openness and incompleteness, making the literary work an ongoing process that does not end with a final full stop.

The dissolution of boundaries between traditional literary genres in digital space in favor of a "composite text" that integrates image, sound, and code within a single narrative structure.

The study has demonstrated that the digital medium is not a neutral channel, but rather a "structural agent" that guides the reader's cognitive pathways and imposes its own logic on the creative process.

The shift of critical authority from analyzing purely linguistic structures to analyzing the "semiotics of the interface" and the mechanisms of navigation within hypertextual environments.

The redefinition of "textual pleasure" as a pleasure derived from freedom, participation, and discovery, rather than passive reception of linguistic aesthetics.

The necessity of developing "interdisciplinary" critical tools that combine linguistics, computer science, and visual aesthetics in order to approach digital literature in a holistic manner.

The digital space has granted literature a form of "creative commons," which requires rethinking intellectual property laws and notions of artistic originality in the age of digitalization.

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