

**TECHLIT: TECHNOLOGY REWRITING LITERATURE**

“No force on earth can stop an idea whose time has come.” – Victor Hugo

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Abstract

It is a fact that technology has impacted the world in a huge way, and literature has not been left untouched. It is important to identify how technology has rewritten, reinterpreted and redefined literature and to answer the concern whether technology has proved to be a blessing or a curse to literature. In the present world, with its technological breakthrough, literary authors of all genres whether poets, novelists, essayists or playwrights – have so many handy tools facilitating a better literary output. The author can jot down his notes right onto his Smartphone or tablet whenever he feels inspired. The modern software, with its options of cutting, copying and pasting gives the author great flexibility, fluidity and freedom in swapping, moving, or deleting words, sentences, or even paragraphs. It allows use of highlights and underline to emphasise and strikethrough to strike off what's unimportant. It enables easy searching of a word and the option of replacing it too.

Introduction

Authors can look up for any word's synonym or antonym with just a click and don't need to sit with a heavy dictionary and thesaurus as the earlier scholars had to. Whether it helps the user achieve a better vocabulary is a question that needs to be answered. Technology thus, is like a robot or personal servant with many hands to serve the modern writer's many purposes. With much of the population suffering from ocd these tools aid the author in justifying the text and to arrive at an almost perfect looking piece. There are also many possibilities for choosing from diverse page designs and templates. With instant noodle and instant coffee on his computer table, the author likes the instant write-up he is able to produce with the help of all the tools available on the Word Processor.

A poet can work more easily on the number of lines, length of lines, on the shape of his stanzas and the whole structure of the poem. The author can work and rework on the draft until he gets a final systematized, refined, polished and the best form of his work. Thus, the author not just remains an author but an editor and printer too. The incoherence and messiness that came, when writing with the hand is happily done away with here. There are some who label it as laziness, but what's wrong in making life easier with the knowledge human beings are bestowed with? While the ancient author can be imagined as one burning the midnight lamp and labouring to move his quill at the stroke of inspiration, the post-modern writer can be seen leisurely typing away his thoughts onto a tablet on his bed. There is no doubt that technology has eased the writer's work and brought him more freedom.

Technology is extremely helpful when it comes to making a research on any word, idea or topic that the author wants. Therefore it can't be denied that the literary author today multitasks between his word document and the google search page while pouring out his



heart on the virtual page. To the modern poet thus, Google and Wikipedia become the muses. Hence while Milton invoked the Holy Spirit to help him in the tremendous task he was undertaking – writing one of the greatest classics “Paradise Lost”, the modern author invokes the web. Modern writers like Tom McCarthy confess that when they write on things they never saw in their lives, they research on it by watching YouTube videos. Thus technology for them serves as memory. (McCarthy 2014)

Revolutions in Information and Communication technologies (ICT) have led to widening of the horizons of learning in all the fields, including Literature. There is no doubt that knowledge sharing has increased manifold when the World Wide Web wrapped the world in its cybernetic filaments. It has broken down all boundaries and has brought to light unknown authors and artists through its various platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, Instagram or YouTube. It also sheds light on works enwrapped in obscurity by providing paraphrases, summary and analysis for research scholars.

Looking back, we have come a long way from cave paintings and papyrus manuscripts to printed paper and digital screens. The printing press took over Europe in 1436 and it brought a great literary revolution. Later, the typewriter took over America in the 19th century and all kinds of writing saw a soar. But the greatest revolution to take over Literature is the many technological advancements and innovations witnessed by the 21st century. In one of the most important modern poems, “The Wasteland”, T. S. Eliot talked about the female typist mentioning the vocation to emphasise the place it held in the modern wasteland.

The role of technology in English language learning in today's world cannot be ignored. Moreover, there are many teachers who vow that teaching literature with the ‘visual aids’ facilitates better learning. In the classroom teaching of literature too, when the teacher shows the students a documentary on Auschwitz after reading the “Night” by Elie Wiesel, the students achieve much more clarity on the text and develop more empathy for people suffering from injustice in the world. When the teacher mentions the marbled page in Lawrence Sterne's Tristram Shandy in her Modern Literature class, how much more real it becomes when she shows them slides of the marbled page on the projector. Thus, in many ways, technology enlivens literature.

The Problems of Technology are many. There are many who consider modern digital technology as a threat to a book's authority and some even label it as the death of literature. There is such an overwhelming abundance of information available for any topic on the internet that it almost paralyses the reader. When a student or research scholar searches for a topic he is bombarded with so much of information that he is unable to decide which of it is correct and which is incorrect.

While Ted Hughes in his meta-fiction poetry “Thought –fox” talks about sitting at midnight with his windows open towards a jungle from where the fox like thought enters his mind, the modern writer sits with multiple application windows open before him and thoughts, ideas and inspirations flow to him from the cyber jungle. The ease which technology provides the



writer also prevents him from the much needed time and introspection which he should invest in his work.

With the rise of lot of books available for free online reading and e-readers there has been a huge blow to the publishing industry but availability of too many literary works puts the reader in a tight spot and he is unable to decide which book to choose.

Social media connects the authors to the readers in a big way. Never before were the authors in such constant touch with their readers. The modern writers are so active online that any writer in today's world is presented with a dilemma: either Publish or Perish i.e. you either bloom online or you wither offline.

One great danger with technology is that what one writes is out there and anyone can not just read it but also it can be easily misused thus making the writer quite vulnerable. But the very technology which can lead to plagiarism also provides solutions to track plagiarism.

The internet has given rise to many new evils. It has been a major forum where a lot of fake news, hoax messages, rumours and lies are spread causing much damage to people's lives and reputation. Besides, typos have given rise to the notorious "Wicked Bible" and "Judas Bible."

Privacy of people's personal information is also in jeopardy. Mention should be made of 'The Cambridge Analytica Scandal' involving a British political consulting firm which played a great role in elections all over the World including India and US. They acquired personal details of approximately 87 million Facebook users through the users of a Facebook app called "This is Your Digital Life" to understand their electoral choices. This directly leads to the question whether technology is an empowering or an overpowering tool.

Cultural lag is a phenomenon when technology runs much ahead of society and therefore, people find it difficult to catch up with technological advancements. This leads to many social conflicts. However, let's not be swept away by the deluge of social networking sites. The instant fame of social media is shocking but it won't be wrong to say that even this online sensation is not static. A very fitting example is Orkut which had a silent funeral in the noisy modern world.

"Memory is externalized and disembodied in the cloud; imagining is externalized in film, TV, and Google images." (Clemens, 2017) Technology is making students fail as readers as all they do is study gist of novels and skim through their summaries to pass their exams. He calls it "Pandora's Box" and "genie out of the bottle" and laments that it cannot be undone. Instead, students should be challenged to let their imagination soar, develop curiosity, release creativity and find new ways of conceiving the world rather than depending on such external aids.

"The internet has turned out to be especially adept at the replication, multiplication and distribution of error." (Clemens, 2017). He goes on to cite examples from Literature which shows that even popular lines from Literature were found to be severely distorted when searched for on the net. Even the omniscient Google who provides answers to myriad



questions in any given field of learning has failed to unravel or answer many religious mysteries and supernatural elements.

Today's tech-savvy students are not able to improve their vocabulary by the constant use of tech-slang and sms language involving lots of acronyms on WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, Blog posts and the never-ending comment threads. They lose the ability to write complete sentence structures or even words with correct spellings and appropriate grammar. The notorious emoji's barely express one's true feelings and emotions. Everyone is writing much more than they did before because of social networking but it is not leading to improvement of language and communication skills and thus it is affecting their job opportunities and performance adversely. (Fetzer, 2017)

In the religious arena, it is true that one doesn't look as spiritual in the church reading the Bible on an app in one's smartphone as one would with a Bible in one's hand but the novice can understand the Good News Version of the Bible more easily than the King James Version which is just a click away. Besides, there are many non-Christians who download the Bible on their phone as they don't own a copy of it.

The prospects of Technology are no less. The most outstanding feature in Modern and Post-modern Writing is experimental writing - experimentation in form, content, structure and presentation – and technology, though not the only means opens up new avenues for such creative artists to produce highly experimental works. Technological advancement provides many prospects and frameworks for experimentation with text. Thus, a computer is better than the printer and the typewriter in the respect that it not only prints text but also creates text.

Steve Jobs once said “What a computer is to me is it's the most remarkable tool that we have ever come up with. It is the equivalent of a bicycle for our minds.” Literature is formed up of creative as well as critical works. Technology has not just led to more creative output but to more critical work too. Reviews of literary works now are not just confined to the newspaper but technology these days allows many platforms and forums where readers too can offer their review and critique of a certain work, one very popular example being blog reviews.

Just as the print revolution led to mass production of literature both ancient and medieval making it easily available to the common man, the internet has also made literature of diverse eras, languages and cultures easily available to the public, leading to their greater appreciation and understanding. Any excellent work of art today has the opportunity to be seen and appreciated by people all over the world.

Print culture has not been erased completely with the advent of technology, as some fear. Books are not outdated anymore but rather has attained the honour of an aesthetic object. Amazon is the world's largest Bookstore. Flipkart, Alibaba and such online book sellers wield an overwhelming authority in the arena of online deals. My cup runneth over, Lord!

However, with the taking over of e-readers like Kindle, we have entered into an era of “Paperless literature” like the cashless economy which is the aim of governments across the



globe. One significant feature of e-reading is its portability factor. It is very helpful to those who don't have freedom of movement. Iphones provide ebooks, an application where one can download lots of free books. Podcasts allow one to hear audio versions of literary works ranging from classical to modern. Ted Ed is a website which teaches students the importance of reading, thus encouraging and developing their reading habits.

Technology has also opened up new job opportunities such as freelancing – content writing, editing and the like which gives one the freedom to work from the comforts of one's home. Social media is a very important and popular aspect of communication in today's world. By providing an open platform for all the people, it has surely become a great leveller.

Technology has affected Prose writing in a big way. Aleatory writing (from Latin meaning 'dice') is a feature of post-modern writing where the writer leaves his work to luck and chance just like the throwing of a dice. Creative artists have used various aleatoric techniques like the well-known 'cut-up' technique used by William Burroughs, a famous Beat Generation poet, in which he cuts up typed pages, throws it up in the air and allows the random fall of words and phrases to take the shape of his work. "The Third Mind" (1978) which he wrote in collaboration with Brion Gysin made use of the cut-up technique and contains many short stories and poetry. Cuddon describes this seemingly crazy experimentation so beautifully: "They do not leave things to chance; they create the opportunities of chance. There is a certain 'method' in their madness." (Cuddon, 2010)

Jack Kerouac, another well-known Beat Generation poet also experimented with his work "On the Road" (1957) whose first draft was a 120-foot long continuous typed paper which is displayed at the British Library. Other experimental works include B. S. Johnson's Unfortunates (1969) which is called a 'novel in a box'. The novel comes in a box of separately bound chapters and the readers are asked to arrange and read it in the order they want. Tom Philip's 'A Humument: A Treated Victorian Novel' (1970) is another notable example in which he worked on a Victorian novel called "A Human Document" (1892) by W. H. Mallock where he took out words and phrases to bring out a book hidden inside the original book - a literal 'reading between the lines.' The title itself is derived by a partial deletion of the original title: A Human Document. Jennifer Egan who got the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction (2011) for her "A Visit from the Goon Squad" has its 12th chapter in the form of Power Point Slides.

Technology also played a great role in reviving and creating many genres of literature. For example the mass production of journals created a demand for fictional matter as providing only factual information made it too dull and was comparably a lesser paid job leading to the gradual rise of short fiction. (Luckhurst, 2016) This also gave rise to the 'gossip columnist' which is a big hit with the newspapers of modern age. Fan fiction is also a modern creation where the fans recreate the plot-line of a popular work

Dystopian novels warn of a future where technology takes over the Universe. They create the scary picture of technology's omnipresence in today's world where everything is saved on



the cloud. One well known example is Aldous Huxley's Brave New World (1931) which is one of the greatest dystopian novels.

'Science Fiction' is a work which envisions technological breakthroughs in the future. It is interesting to note that there are technological innovations which were first depicted in science fiction and later developed in real life. Towards the mid 90's, however, novelists were writing about the internet not as science fiction but as science fact. 'Cyberpunk Literature', a sub-genre of Science Fiction also relies heavily on technology including Artificial Intelligence. One well known example is William Gibson's Neuromancer (1984) which talks about how the internet will take over the Universe. In the later part of the 80s, 'hypertext' fiction came to the forefront as the next technical revolution in literature. Michael Joyce's *afternoon, a story*(1987) was published on a disk and offered short chunks of prose that could be read in any order, and changed each time you read it, so creating many potential narratives. Geoff Ryman's *253* (1996) was created as a website and the title is derived from the number of people travelling in a London Underground train whose stories could be accessed in any order.(Luckhurst, 2016) In the 21st century, fiction graduated to greater heights. In 2013, Elliott Holt launched what can be termed as "Twitter Fiction" which was a big hit with her fans.

These days in the theatrical field, theatres are using technology to perk up the theatrical performances. Technological developments and the two World Wars influenced the rise of the Theatre of Absurd which illustrates the essential absurdity surrounding man's existence and the Universe.

Along with prose, poetry too underwent changes with technological progress. Concrete Poetry or Visual poetry refers to poems arranged in different shapes to match the theme of the poem. There is no doubt that it has benefitted a lot from technology, although it existed before technology. One famed example is the French poet Stéphane Mallarmé's *Coup de dés* which is a long poem about a shipwreck in which the lines are arranged to produce a visual imagery of shipwreck. However, the over-emphasis on form in such poems leads to an exclusion of sense, syntax and grammar. Concrete poetry depends mainly on typography which is an offshoot of the print culture.

With the advent of Twitter which allows only 140 characters, there has risen a new generation of post-modern poets writing their poems in 2 or 3 lines, with all the profoundness that a 14 line traditional sonnet would give. Thus technology has impacted literature with economy in expression. There is also a cluster of poetic stars on Instagram to name a few - Lang Leav, Christopher Poindexter, Atticus, R. M. Drake, Paradox and Metaphors and Words of Worth who enjoy a great fan following. The father of English Essay, Francis Bacon, had he been alive today would have shared his witty, epigrammatic aphorisms with his Twitter followers daily. And while Shakespeare would have ruled Twitter, with his pearls of wisdom served in calculated brevity, Milton would have reigned over Facebook sharing ingenious elaborate narratives. Milton's Satan said once "It is better to reign in hell than to serve in heaven."



Technology left its mark even on movements ranging from literature to politics. Feminism which flourished dynamically in literature also finds voices in social media. #MeToo was a movement which spread in social media to raise awareness regarding the alarming magnitude in which sexual harassment prevails in today's world. Technology, thus not just rewrites but reinterprets literature.

Technology affected literary movements too. The Futurists were a literary group which originated in Italy at the beginning of 20th century. They advocated a complete break with tradition and aimed at new forms, new subjects and new styles in keeping with the advent of a mechanistic age. They extolled dynamism, the machine, speed and the splendour of war and patriotism. (Cuddon, 1999) It also influenced other literary movements like Dadaism, expressionism and surrealism.

Cubism, one of the most influential art movements of the 20th century, was pioneered by great painters including Pablo Picasso. In it subjects are shown as geometrical figures with three dimensional forms showing various viewpoints and angles. In the modern age where camera was taking the place of art, there rose a question whether art was necessary. But, cubism, a new movement rose which broke away from traditional art forms and like technology it insisted on a new way of visualising and interpreting. Sometimes, technology challenges art to become better in order to survive. Cubism influenced modern literary authors like Virginia Woolf, James Joyce and William Faulkner who used cubist elements in their works.

Social media played a great role in the Egyptian revolution in 2011 which overthrew Hosni Mubarak's dictatorship who ruled Egypt for over a decade.

Conclusion

The question remains: Would Shakespeare be a better author with a laptop in his hand? Bardolators would disagree: he was such a genius; technology would have left him unaffected.

The world may have lost forever the prospect of watching with pride and admiration at the first handwritten draft of its favourite author with the coming of technology but on the whole, the good effects of technology on literature far outweigh the bad ones.

We may or may not like the developments in technology, but in the present world it is inconceivable to think of a life without technology. It is thus, an irreversible phenomenon. The only way left before us is to make the best of it. Art and Literature boast of a history which is as old as Human history itself. If it survived so long, it surely is a major force to be reckoned with. Technology can never annihilate or replace art or literature, rather it only augments and compliments its growth, though in new and diverse ways. Moreover, as Literature and Technology share the same goals i.e. to "instruct" and to "delight" they complement each other rather than working antagonistically. Literature may not be in the form it originated or grew over the years – in oral forms or in print version but it does bloom and has a future in newer versions like the digital screens in everyone's hand.



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