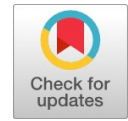# Literary trends in Cyber Space: Portrayal of the Metamodern "wings of Poesy"

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Abstract: English literature, after sailing through different courses down the history, has now entered a new space, which may affect its further cruise. The growth of technological space has given rise to a new genre called cyber literature, which plays a significant role in the promotion of literary works. Cyber literature refers to written literary texts, distributed and read on electronic screens. This electronic space provides a more flexible and convenient platform for the artistic expressions of aspiring and budding authors. Cyber literature which emerged towards the end of the 1990s through blogging, later expanded in social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Myspace etc. While the means and modes of expression changed, literature was again moulded into something else, satisfying the needs of a modern reader. This paper explores the possibility of social media and online communities as the new alternative to print publication, and it also aims at studying the present and upcoming literary trends in the cyber space through a few examples. The case study includes an analysis of the works of Rupi Kaur, an author who paved her way for fame using Instagram; Terribly Tiny Tales and other pages in Facebook which seized the young hearts with relatable snippets and prose poems; applications like "Haiku jam" which bring together people from all over the world to write a Haiku in unison. The modern generation which upgrades their lifestyle along with the technological evolution, and the contemporary issues that affect them, brings out a new literary culture. The unrestrained author-reader interaction further decreases the former gap which held back the readers from voicing their opinions. While it possesses both positive and negative effects, it creates a space where everyone can be a writer, though only the fittest will survive.

Keywords: Cyber literature, Literary trends, Rupi Kaur, Instagram, Terribly Tiny Tales

I. INTRODUCTION

While every ruler has to uncrown himself someday, literature is a czar who wouldn't leave the throne. Through the years, the medium and form went through long and complex paths, but still, the human appetite for literature never ends. With the emergence of internet and digital media, literature too has created a space for itself. Since the platform is freely available all around the world, cyber literature opens up a new era in the history of literature. Following the present culture and trends, it marks the dawn of a myriad new genres and forms. Piret Viires in her article "Literature in cyberspace" tentatively divides the cyber literature into three: 1. All literary texts available in the Internet (WWW). This term covers prose or poetry texts available at the home pages of professional writers; anthologies of prose or poetry published and digitised; collections of classical texts (e.g. Project Gutenberg2); online literature magazines (e.g. Ninniku3), etc….2. Non-professional literary texts available at the Internet, which inclusion in literary analysis expands the boundaries of traditional literature…3.Hypertext literature and cybertexts. These would include literary texts of more complex structure, which exploit various hypertext solutions, but also intricate multimedia cybertexts [1]. (Piret Viires, 2005)

This paper will be focusing on cyber literature as literature made and read in the internet and on electronic screens, and about authors who emerged through different platforms in cyber world that will conceive new trends in cyber literature. Cyber literature has replaced the idea of always carrying a book around, and it goes hand in hand with the busy and engrossing life of the modern generation where these poems and fiction create a tiny escape from their schedule. Since the majority of the world is addicted to their phones, literature through digital media is received with open arms. It not only entertains its audience, but inspires many hidden talents to reach a larger crowd. They also have an opportunity to listen to what their readers have to say, thus making the reader- writer interactivity its unique and exceptional feature. From being merely a "photo and video sharing social networking site", Instagram has travelled a long way towards influencing its users. Online shopping, brand promotions, and actors promoting their movies online has become a common sight on social networks now. In the present day scenario, where writers too occupy a space in the "celebrity label", much has been done to create an impression of their personal lives and private thoughts open to the public. Social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram give the people a personal connection with the person they follow, by getting a sneak-peak of their daily lives. Whether they are authentic or made up, the public choose to follow their league. Many small artists across the world have found the platform they longed for, through these applications. Rupi Kaur, Nikita Gill and Atticus are a few among the many poets who slipped into limelight by sharing their musings through Instagram or similar platforms. Most of them shared some common trademarks, comments Nilanjana Roy in her article "Voices of the New Instagram Poets" in *The Financial*

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Times, "the few sparse lines, set in an old-fashioned font; the earnestness; the solemn aphorisms; the slam poet's trick of the minor fall, the major lift on each line; the cute drawings and photographs [2]." Since cyber space has proved an uncontrolled publishing forum, along with the genuine contributors, there will be many parodists who blatantly follow others' statements. The law of survival is applicable in this arena too, as successful writers like Rupi Kaur will possibly manage to place her foot in the history of literature and the weak parodists will fall into junk literature.

Decades before, Shakespeare observed that "brevity is the soul of wit", and now, brevity is the new vogue. Micro-fiction had made a silent entry much earlier in literature but became audible only at present. The history of "flash fiction" or "short short stories" can be traced back to the 1920s through the *Cosmopolitan* magazine and in 1930s through the anthology "American Short Short Story." These bite sized 100-200 word fiction made its stunning re-entry through the emergence of Twitter. These later developed many micro blogging services like "twitterature" which includes diverse genres like poetry, prose, aphorisms and fiction written individually or collaboratively. *Terribly Tiny Tales* and *Scribbled Stories* are platforms that promote micro-fiction and provide a space where everyone can be a writer, and applications like *Haiku Jam* are creative initiatives that hand out a chance for people across the world to create Haikus in unison.

II. LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN CYBERSPACE

Language in cyber space announces a change from the layback reading style to commuters reading a screen's worth of narrative inside crowded metros, subways, state service buses and long queues in front of the metropolitan counters. Drifting away from the conventional grammar and spelling standards, literature attains brevity with orthographic abbreviations/contractions (e.g.pic for picture), initialisms, acronyms (e.g. cuz for because); combined letter/number homophones (e.g. cloud9); combined letters/words; immoderate use of punctuations; capitalization for expressing emphasis (e.g. huh???, WHAT….?); emotions reduced to emoticons and smileys (e.g. :-) for happy) rather than ornate wordings and typographic symbols (e.g.<3 for love). The below cited examples of micro-fiction proves the same:

> The first kiss took her to cloud5
> The proposal to cloud8. Marriage
> Would have taken her to cloud9,
> Had cancer not taken him to
> Heaven [3]. (*Terribly Tiny Tales,* Bodhisahon)

This micro-fiction under reference was digitally published in the series #cloud in *Terribly Tiny Tales* is an example of combined letter/number homophones.

> Inthertrainwewerelikethis.Adrunken
> Mandozedoffandmissedhisstop.He
> Awokeandcursedmeloud.Iwantedto
> Pushhimofforsmashhishead.But,
> Wewerelikethis [4]. (*Terribly Tiny Tales,* Sarat)

This snippet published in the series #train in *Terribly Tiny Tales* is an example of omissions of punctuation, apostrophes and capitalization. The linguistic framework of a conventional sentence structure was manipulated simply to suit the theme '#train'. But this manipulation hasn't been brought under serious criticism as the modern world is on an enroute to digitalization. This nonsensical transmogrifications or inanities lead to a kind of literary trend termed by Naomi Baron, an American linguist, as "Linguistic Whateverism". This phrase refers to the current tendency of the wired generation to the conventional rules of grammar, punctuation and usage, and "say -- well, whatever."

> The primary manifestation of this attitude is a marked indifference to the need for consistency in linguistic usages. At issue is not whether to say who or whom or whether none as the subject of a sentence takes a singular or plural verb, but whether it really matters which form you use. This challenge to the fundamental principle of language as rule-governed behavior is less a display of linguistic defiance than a natural reflection of changing educational policies, shifts in social agendas, a move in academia towards philosophical relativism, the magnifying effects of technologies that support computer mediated communication, and a commitment to life on the clock [5]. (Naomi S. Baron, 2003)

According to American structuralists and neogrammarians, language is supposed to have a linguistic regularity at the phonological and morphological level. Various theories proposed by structuralists and linguists comprehend the linguistic competence of a language user extensively. But, this brevity by the online poets and novelists is whole heartedly accepted by the audience as most of them lead a "life on the clock" and "text in the first lane". Ninety-eight cell phone novels were published in 2007 and five among them were the best sellers, which were later adapted into movies.

Language of e-texting and e-literature has its own literary repercussions. The literary quality is at stake because of this extensive brevity. This may also lead to the overuse of unstable idiolects which may further result in literary junk. An analysis of this trend was done by the American Federation of Teachers:
Kate Ross presents the view of the American Federation of Teachers:

> Text and instant messaging are negatively affecting students' writing quality on a daily basis, as they bring their abbreviated language into the classroom. As a result of their electronic chatting, kids are making countless syntax, subject-verb agreement and spelling mistakes in writing assignments. … [M]any teachers believed that students' wide use of "text speak" was a key factor in their students' negative performance. … [T]ext speak is a problem [6].

Cyber literature can be put under a broader term called Meta-Modern Literary Culture. Meta-modernism is a new addition to the contemporary literary theories. The incongruity of metafiction and self-consciousness of post modernism paved the way for the meta-modern literary culture.

New generations of artists increasingly abandon the aesthetic precepts of deconstruction, parataxis, and pastiche in favor of aesth-ethical notions of reconstruction, myth, and metaxis [in-betweenness]. These trends and tendencies can no longer be explained in terms of the postmodern. They express an (often guarded) hopefulness and (at times feigned) sincerity that hint at another structure of feeling, intimating another discourse [7]. (Vermeulen and Akker, 2010, p.10)

Online poets and novelists introduce innovative styles for refreshing narratives or the forms that post modernism was trying to. In 2011, Luke Turner, a London-born artist co-edited the "Notes on Meta modernism", and collaborated with other intellectuals on a project called "The Meta modernist Manifesto."

It concluded that meta modernism shall be defined as the mercurial condition between and beyond irony and sincerity, naivety and knowingness, relativism and truth, optimism and doubt, in pursuit of a plurality of disparate and elusive horizons. The manifesto embraced Vermeulen and Akker's earlier conceptions of meta modernism as afore mentioned. It put no limits to human ingenuity and the natural change of all systems and viewed the past, the present and the future as closely intertwined [8]. (Luke Turner, 2011)

III. RUPI KAUR AS AN *INSTA POET*

Still in the spring of her life, Rupi Kaur is the author of two bestselling books in the world. Two decades before, it would have been a tough task showing the world what you are capable of, but now with umpteen number of social media platforms and communities, sharing your talent is just one click away, and publicizing yourself has become an art. From writing small personal poems on her friend's birthdays to becoming #1 *New York Times* Best Seller Book's author, Rupi Kaur attained success in a startling short time. Inspired by reading Anais Nin, Virginia Woolf, and Warsaw Shire, it was by the November of 2013, aged 21, that she took poetry seriously. She shared her works first through Tumblr and then through Instagram where she amassed 1.5k followers within a very short span of 4-5 years. Assured in her large readership, she went forth to self-publish her first book *Milk and Honey*, which sold out 2.5 million copies.

The simplicity and frankness of her poems made them easily relatable to her audience. Her poems dealt with themes that are contemporary and prevalent to every woman in the modern world. As discussed earlier, apart from sharing her poems, she had to feed her followers' curiosity about her real life. Rebecca Watts observes:

the new poets are products of a cult of personality, which demands from its heroes only that they be "honest" and "accessible", where honesty is defined as the constant expression of what one feels, and accessibility means the complete rejection of complexity, subtlety, eloquence and the aspiration to do anything well [9]. (Rebecca Watts, 2018)

Some controversies that followed her posts gave her both supporters and opponents, but above all, it gave her publicity. In addition to the fact that her followers were waiting for her to release a book, Rupi Kaur's photos of excerpts on her new book ushered the sale to a great deal. Thus, she made a flawless entry from being an *insta poet* to the author of two bestselling books.

Like e e cummings, Emily Dickenson and other poets of the past, Kaur too has set a writing style of her own. Most of her poems are very short and range from one line to ten or fifteen lines. She doesn't stick on to any particular metrical form, rather puts it as it dawns to her mind: sometimes lyrical and sometimes in prose. Writing in lower-cased letters and the absence of punctuations except for period are part of the style that she developed in honour of her native tongue Gurmukhi script where there is only one case and the only punctuation is period. Thus, as Dr. Madhu Jindal says, "Kaur adapts to the fluidity of the modern age whilst retaining a sense of heritage, culture, and power". While it is in question that her poems qualify to be called as a classic, Kaur is on the path of success when it comes to popularity and getting followers. Her diction and theme belong to a stream different from that of the renowned poets of English Literature, but she cleverly manages to be the people's choice using her relatable topics and flawless lyric. Another trait of her works is the illustrations. "These sketches are hand-drawn in ink and complement the poems, visually representing the themes, characters, and situations described in the text. In some cases, the poems are written around or even within the sketches, forcing the reader to examine the interplay between text and image" remarks Dr. Jindal. Her debut work *Milk and Honey* comes under the genre confessional poetry, where the speaker pens down her emotions and encounters. *Milk and Honey* is a bold and beautiful amalgamation of two pristine gifts: poetry and art. Though many trivialize her fame and deprecate her poems, Anindhita Ghose precisely comments, "Rupi Kaur is her own brand with her own narrative of success….Rupi Kaur is an exercise in formatted aesthetics. Business schools should make a case study of her. She's a pop star in couture, putting as much care into her visual identity as she does in packaging and presenting her spoken word pieces [10]."

IV. LITERATURE HEARTED START UPS

"In this age of dwindling attention spans, we've caught yours. /With stories under 2000 characters, we're quick to read, but hard to forget [11]." This is how "the world's most celebrated micro-fiction platform" presents itself. Starting off from a small Facebook group consisting of twelve members, *Terribly Tiny Tales* have grown to a huge initiative that aims to give the netizens something better to scroll upon, in the brief time they have to spare. "Terribly Tiny Tales borrowed from the brevity of Twitter, the impact of flash fiction and the social web's opportunity to easily collaborate", explains the co-founder Anuj Gosalia.

Though they had selected writers in the beginning, *Terribly Tiny Tales* is now an open forum where everyone is welcome to write a tale and the best ones get published in their page. Spreading their space from Facebook to other social media sites like Instagram and Twitter, they have a website and office of their own. They even published a book with Penguin publishers, which is a collection of their 250 terrific tiny tales. Thus, cyber literature collaborates into print publication where the digital media serves as a ladder for those budding writers dreamt of getting their works published.

In order to pay tribute to the legalization of gay marriages in all states of the US, *Terribly Tiny Tales* in alliance with United Colors of Benetton gave its writers the topic LGBT. Such prompts that increase social awareness widens the scope of cyber literature to greater heights. One such micro-fiction is

"My chest hurts, Ammi.' 'Allah will punish you for lying. Go to school!'

Years have passed. Her chest never stops hurting." (#Peshawar) [12]

which was published in the page of *Terribly Tiny Tales* after the incident where seven men killed almost 150 people, most of them were children.

Many micro-fiction platforms sprouted along with *Terribly Tiny Tales* on Facebook lately, like Haiku JAM, Scribbles Stories, Tales Xpress to name a few. What pains a true lover of literature is the fact that most of these possess no literary quality as such, and the only feature they hold is that they are relatable. Since relatability isn't the soul of literature, it is doubtful if they will bestow any works worth remembering. Within a span of three years, *Terribly Tiny Tales* had seventy-five brands in collaboration where they send prompts based on the brand. (For e.g., #united for United Colors of Benetton) Thus literature hearted start-ups prove to be money minded in nature.

Among these platforms, one which distinctly stands out is, Haiku JAM which is a "collaborative creativity app." It allows a space where three people from different corners of the world come together to write a Haiku (Japanese form of poem) in unison, one line apiece. As the result of this turn by turn process, a Haiku is produced, with three lines, five syllables in the first and third line, and seven syllables in the second line.

"In the end, I was

Just a shadow trying to

Become the night [13]." (Greed, Haiku JAM)

Most catchy and stellar ones are featured every day in their Facebook page. Haiku JAM was made as "a space for time-poor, creatively inclined people to engage in creative activities" explains Dhrupad Karwa, co-founder and CEO of Haiku JAM. Some jammers are using this app to improve their English language skills and some others as a pill for stress relief. Diverting from the normal tradition, the users of this app are not poets, but mostly people of other professions ranging from engineers to nurses who try out Haiku JAM only to see how the poem with their share will evolve. Thus, businessmen who are looking for new start-ups and busy professionals who crave for a break from their work are also unknowingly being dragged into the path of literature in cyber space.

V. CONCLUSION

Cyber literature reinforces the productivity of literature as it opens itself to a wider spectrum of readers and writers." Though it amasses huge popularity, the risk of "whateverism" taking over the language may produce nothing but temporary and dull writing. Ensuring an exit way for plagiarism and parodists would make cyber space an easier stage for authentic writers, or else, it will continue to provide a fertile soil for literature to flourish, but by turning a myopic eye towards the quality and class that a litterateur demands for.

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