Vision

The development of the field of ‘digital humanities’ in universities requires that researchers from different specializations (especially the department of computer science) become integrated in the humanities, so that every researcher can achieve the desired developments in his field in terms of research, education, creativity, and the like.

Since I am a researcher from the field of literature, I will focus on the future of the instruction and study of literature from a post-modern perspective, based on an exploration of the most recent developments that have occurred in literature in the shadow of informatics. I will also suggest a multi-level action strategy including the most important projects that could be implemented in the coming years in order to shift the learning and teaching of literature from the traditional to the digital system.

Jean Clément, professor of digital literature at the University of Paris, states:

[P]aradoxically, literature, out of all the arts, is the first art to find itself in the face of informatics at a very early stage, despite the fact that the encounter between literature and informatics remained modest for a long time. Today, digital book marketing has become large scale, and we can speak of a real cultural revolution as impactful as the emergence of the printing press itself. This phenomenon in all of its dimensions cannot be sufficiently treated by speaking only of the changes in the patterns of book distribution and the consumption, reception, and reading of literature. Rather, one must understand the characteristics of digital writing which prompted the emergence and burgeoning of new forms of literary writing and led to a fundamental change in the relationship between the text, the reader, and the author.[[1]](#footnote-1)

The quote above confirms that literature was one of the first fields in the humanities to be influenced by digital developments. Furthermore, the relationship between literature and digital space is a complex relationship with many directions and offshoots. Therefore, the exploration of the field of literature can be among the starting points for developing the field of humanities in Israel’s academic institutions, as has already occurred in many universities around the world.

It is well-known that there are many advantages and benefits that have returned to literature with the transition from the printed page to the digital space. The most important of these benefits and advantages are: overcoming the boundaries of time and place; quick distribution; low cost; and the availability of, and accessibility to books, including the ability to download many books and dictionaries for free via an array of sites.

However, the qualitative shift in the history of literature began when authors began using multi-media in creative writing. Thus, writing is no longer the only mode of expression available; it is now possible to: move words around in the text space; add audio, music, and video clips; manipulate lighting and colors; include links, etc. In short, a new literature known as ‘digital literature’ (or ‘electronic literature’) has emerged, carrying the genes of the genre in which it originated; I believe it is time for it to be incorporated into the literature curricula at Israeli colleges and universities, as has been done in many advanced universities around the world.

‘Electronic literature,’ as defined by the international Electronic Literature Organization (ELO), is “work with an important literary aspect that takes advantage of the capabilities and contexts provided by the stand-alone or networked computer.”[[2]](#footnote-2) Electronic literature, also referred to as ‘e-lit,’ has witnessed enormous developments in the last two decades, so much so that the electronic literary genres that emerged in this period have surpassed the traditional literary genres we had previously known. A great number of academic studies have been published about the new digital literary transformations, not to mention the annual international conferences pertaining to the topic in question organized by the ELO and other like-minded institutions. Furthermore, peer-reviewed scientific journals about e-lit have emerged, such as *Ebr*, *Hyprrhiz*, and others.

The emergence of electronic literature has also led to the emergence of post-modern theories and terminologies that attempt to describe the current stage in all of its complexities. In particular, they explore the description of the complex relationship between natural human language and constructed computer language. They also explore how literature has been influenced by the emergence of the internet and social media and the consequent emergence of new literary genres that have brought about a change in textual mechanisms and the concepts and elements of creative science. Some of the most important modern terminologies are the terms ‘posthumanism’ (or ‘postbiologicalism’); Katherine Hayles’ book *How We Became Posthuman* is considered one of the most important books that discusses the posthuman evolution of humans and its impact on literature. Hayles reviews the most important techniques that changed the face of literature, namely ‘augmented reality’ and ‘virtual reality.’ These two technologies made reading an experience similar to landing on another planet — the reader enters a private studio wearing a helmet and glasses to read the text, hear sounds, and experience sensations emanating from the literary text.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Social media has also played a significant role in changing the way that we think about literature. Several literary genres have emerged along with social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Novel, and more.

Despite all the recent developments that have occurred in the field of literature, digital literature as a whole is still an uncharted subject in Israeli universities, the Hebrew University among them. It became apparent to me at a number of conferences in Israel in which I participated, that digital literature is completely absent from both academic and lay contexts.

Therefore, I view myself as a pioneer in this field, with the challenging task of introducing, defining, and presenting digital literature to scholars and students, as well as incorporating it into scientific research in the various literary departments in the University. Thinking about literature, how it is taught, created, and consumed by readers necessitates a consideration of digital media, since digital media informs all stages of production and consumption of contemporary literature, transforming the roles of authors, readers, and critics.

Engagement in this new literature is, in my opinion, a cultural necessity, not just a phase; the issue has been established ideologically, culturally, and anthropologically. By returning to different forms of expression, both ancient and modern, we will notice that they alone have manifested the ability to embrace the meaning of human existence in every stage of history.

Today, whether we like it or not, we are advancing technologically. Technology will become more accessible to and accepted by the coming generations — the digital, android, and smart phone generations. Consequently, we are required to write with modern tools and to give expression to the human being of this era, in his technological and virtual world. The significant orientation towards technology in all fields means that we will one day find ourselves obligated as scholars specializing in literature and language to, willingly or unwillingly, like others, enter the digital world with all the necessary knowledge and tools. Thus, it is imperative that we begin to prepare ourselves for this stage as quickly as possible in order to bridge the gap that grows every day and disconnects us from the enormous developments in the field of literature. In order to accomplish this, I propose the following multi-level action strategy:

* **Scientific Research**: Encouraging students and scholars to study electronic literature through authoring new studies and submitting master’s dissertations and doctoral theses on the topic in question (especially by utilizing new scientific research tools in information technology, which open new horizons for scholars and students).
* **The Teaching Curriculum:** New courses should be incorporated into the teaching curriculum in order to familiarize students with digital literature and the changes it has prompted in literary theory. Students should be introduced to the new literary genres produced by technology and learn the impact of digital media on creative systems. Such courses could include, for example, “Introduction to Digital Literature,” “Literature and Social Media,” “Internet and Language,” etc., in addition to online courses through partnerships with international universities.
* **Interdepartmental Work**: Cooperation between the Arabic language department and the computer science and programming department, and seeking common interests between these two departments.
* **Equipment and Tools Infrastructures:** It is imperative to provide the equipment and tools necessary to create a digital narrative laboratory at the university to enable students and researchers to produce innovative digital literary genres based on various technologies and software. These can include visual poetry, interactive fiction, hypertext novel, holopoetry, Twitter Novel, Facebook Novel, Flash Poetry, Generative works, video poetry, virtual reality text, augmented reality text, etc. Naturally, one can benefit from international experiments pertaining to the topic, such as *Electronic Literature Lab (ELL).*[[4]](#footnote-4)
* **The Public Sector:** Hold exhibitions of digital literature and open them up to the general public. The institutions and universities interested in the study of digital literature should seek to establish special exhibitions in galleries equipped with the latest technology to expose the public to digital literature and analyze the latest developments in the field. This may inspire authors, especially from the younger generation, to encounter the literary experience in a new and different light.
* **Presenting New Projects:** Students and researchers should be encouraged to think of new projects that contribute to the fields of language and literature, and to move them from the printed page to the digital level. These might include, for example: creating electronic literary books; preparing electronic modern dictionaries; digital archiving of Arabic heritage (especially manuscripts that are difficult to obtain); verifying old texts digitally through the employment of technology and hypertext; producing audio files to preserve poetic texts in their various forms; writing interactive children’s literature; and other projects that can preserve literary heritage and present it in contemporary style.
* **Foreign Relations:** Establishing academic relations between The Hebrew University and international literary organizations in order to exchange knowledge and experiences.

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2. https://eliterature.org/pad/elp.html [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See for example https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9dvjTK-PgXI. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. http://dtc-wsuv.org/wp/ell/2018 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)