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Navigating the Virtual Realm: Cybercultural Portrayals in Post-postmodern Fiction

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Abstract

In this article, I explore the portrayals of cyberculturalism in post-postmodern literature, exploring how a number of contemporary literary works have been influenced by virtuality, digital technology, electronic textuality, and multimediality. I also examine how cyberculturalism in literature represents a challenge to traditional notions of authorship and ownership, fostering collaboration and collective creation. Furthermore, I display how cyberculturalism dismantles the publishing monopoly and provides authors with a variety of outlets to release their works. Additionally, I draw upon the dominance of the internet, AI, ChatGPT, and social media in shaping new forms of social communication in post-postmodern literature, and how cybercultural environments impact users' identities, lifestyles, and relationships. To illustrate the paradigms of cyberculturalism in post-postmodern literature, I analyze several contemporary literary works through the lens of cyberculturalism and discuss key characteristics of cyberculturalism as portrayed in those works. I also touch upon themes such as increased level of (dis)connectivity, the consequences of online anonymity, cyberharassment, dichotomy of online/offline identities, and man-machine symbiosis as represented in the selected works.

Keywords: post-postmodernism, cyberculturalism, cyberliterature, social media, AI, electronic literature, ChatGPT, multimediality, virtuality, e-literature, digitalization

1. Introduction

Cyberculturalism refers to the cultural practices that have emerged as a result of the widespread adoption of cyberism in our technologically-influenced era. As a relatively new field of study that explores the interplay between technology and culture, cyberculturalism is a multifaceted phenomenon that encompasses a wide range of practices in post-postmodernity from digitalization and virtual reality to social media and AI. At its core, cyberculturalism encapsulates the ways in which digital technologies, AI, and social media are transforming our cultural practices, creating novel forms of social interaction, communication, commerce, and entertainment. It is “an avalanche of alterations in our contemporary mode of living, caused by technological progress and digitalization” (Tsimpouki et al., 2024, p. 2). The ubiquity of the internet and social media and their impacts on our lives demonstrates how cyberculturalism is distinctive from postmodernism that preceded it, and thus, “cyberspace might be seen as a site which restages postmodern concerns” (Gardiner, 2019, p. 74). In essence, “the advent of the Internet and the post-technological advancements of the new millennium no longer adequately fit the postmodern label” (Krikelis, 2013, p. 99).

The rise of cyberculturalism has influenced contemporary literature and revolutionized the conventional practices in writing, reading, and publishing. The emergence of digital technologies has led to a proliferation of innovative literary forms, including interactive fiction, hypertext literature, network fiction, locative narrative, and e-literature. To produce their works, authors benefit from digitalization to generate transmedia literary pieces that incorporate videos, audios, images, and hyperlinks. Moreover, to publish their works, authors are no longer confined to traditional and commercial publishers. Rather, they benefit from the potential of digital technologies, self-publishing venues, weblogs, and social media platforms to disseminate their works. In this cybercultural climate, the proliferation of digital outlets dismantles the monopoly of traditional publishers, while enabling writers to release their cultural products, whether partially or entirely, in digital environments.

In this article, I delve into the portrayal of cyberculturalism in post-postmodern literature, exploring how various contemporary literary works have been influenced by digitalization, virtuality, electronic textuality, and multimodality. I study how cyberculturalism promotes cooperation and the group production of literary works while challenging conventional ideas of authorship and ownership. Additionally, I discuss how cyberculturalism challenges the monopoly of traditional publishers and provides authors with other means to release their works. Moreover, I examine the dominance of the internet, AI, ChatGPT, and social media in shaping new arrangements in post-postmodern literature, and probe how cybercultural environments impact users’ identities, blurring the lines between their real and fabricated representations. To further

elaborate on the paradigms of cyberculturalism in post-postmodern literature, I examine several contemporary literary works from the perspectives of cyberculturalism.

2. Digital Literature, Multimediality, and Virtuality

As a rapidly evolving field of literature, digital literature is characterized by its use of multimedia and other technologies, offering new ways of storytelling. This expansive field encompasses a wide range of digital genres, styles, and formats, which disrupt conventions of print literature. For instance, hypertexts use links to interconnect different segments of a story and are activated by clicks, screen touches, or keypresses. In the postmodern period, texts were initially created within digitalized environments, and upon completion, they were solidified into printed forms. However, in post-postmodernity, electronic textuality generated within digital environments primarily remains in screen-based formats. Krikelis believes that “when it comes to addressing the textuality and the narrative forms that the post-postmodern era seems to be surfacing, digitalization, computerization, and computationalization hold a pivotal position” (2013, p. 101).

With the ability to incorporate multimedia elements, such as video, sound, and animation, writers are able to create new kinds of literary experiences that were previously impossible. In this cybercultural climate, the post-postmodern “text is richly multimodal, combining text, graphics, color, and nonlinguistic sound effects, along with many other media” (Hayles, 2008, p. 175). The application of multimedia allows digital literature to provide a much more immersive and engaging reading experience than traditional print literature, which “might be regarded as old fashioned and boring in the face of new media” (Hayles, 2008, p. 162). The mutability of digital texts also enables readers to alter fonts, sizes, colors, and shapes of reading materials, and enables writers to easily edit, delete, and revise their texts with a couple of clicks and a touch of some keys. As such, the implementation of digital technology has fundamentally transformed reading and writing literary texts.

Moreover, digital literature allows for collaboration between writers and programmers to create collective works of literature. For such collaboration, digital literature requires to “integrate computation, multimedia integration, interactivity through a variety of input devices, networked data, and digital culture itself” (Flores, 2021, p. 28). The digital novel *Pry* (2014) exemplifies collaboration between Novelist Samantha Gorman and programmer Danny Cannizzaro. Through combining elements of a novel and a film, this multimedia narrative incorporates layered texts, animations, music, images, video flashbacks, and even braille. The touch-screen interface enables readers to pry open between the lines to discover several layers of texts, view images and videos, and uncover deeper details, nestled between the lines. The novel shows the

potential of literature as a medium that can include media formats within its narrative framework. In one chapter, the protagonist James opens a braille Bible, and as he moves his finger over the text, readers see the words on screens of their electronic devices. If readers pass their fingers over the words on the screens, they hear James, reading those words. This is to say that “electronic technology has brought us into the age of ‘secondary orality’ [which] is essentially a more deliberate and self-conscious orality, based permanently on the use of writing and print” (Ong, 2001, p. 136). According to Walter J. Ong, the secondary orality generates a strong sense for listening to spoken words while reading written or printed texts, and as such, it promotes spontaneity (2001, pp. 136-137). In addition to secondary orality, the novel also includes hypertexts, enabling readers to further navigate through the story by clicking on links as well as other interactive elements. Such a post-postmodern trend has the potential to “involve multiple media in a publishing project” (Giovagnoli, 2011, p. 17), a feat that has been unattainable during the postmodern era.

Like *Pry*, Jennifer Egan’s Pulitzer Prize winning novel *A Visit from the Goon Squad* (2010) is a multimedia work, which weaves together multiple stories and perspectives. The novel delves into the impact of technology on our lives and its role in shaping our experiences and relationships. One of the most striking features of the novel is the inclusion of a presentation and music within the twelfth chapter, entitled “Great Rock and Roll Pauses.” The chapter follows the main character, named Alison, who gives a presentation on the music industry to a group of executives. The presentation of the story in the PowerPoint format, linked to the website of the digital version of the novel, reflects the profound influence of digitalization on our culture and literature in the cybercultural age, and it offers a different reading experience. Through this lens, the novel examines how the use of multimedia can displace conventional reading and writing practices and transform how authors employ visuals and sound within their texts. The novelist does not limit herself to PowerPoint and music but also incorporates other types of electronic media, including email, online chat, text messaging, and other forms of electronic communication, representing our common means of communication and forms of cyberculturality.

In the chapter “Safari,” Egan shows how social media and mobile technology bring people closer together, despite geographical distance. The character Jules Jones, a publicist, uses social media to maintain a relationship with her daughter, even though she is in a different part of the world. This chapter illustrates how digital technology can create new forms of intimacy and connection, bridging the physical distance between individuals. At the same time, the novel depicts the dark side of digital technology and how it disrupts relationships and brings about misunderstanding and disconnection. For instance, in the chapter “A to B,” Alison’s addiction and reliance on technology isolate her from people around her. In this cybercultural atmosphere, the novel probes the potential of digital technology to both connect and disconnect us from one another.

In Slide 20, when Alison's mother asks her why she does not write "a *paper*," she retorts, "Ugh! Who even uses that word?" (Egan, 2010, p. 195), signifying the transition from physicality to immateriality and virtuality in post-postmodern era. By the same token, in her novel *You* (2014), Caroline Kepnes portrays how the techno-savvy generation gravitates towards the electronic book copies. As the protagonist declares, "buy pop albums. And books? Fuck books. Get a Kindle. You know why Kindles are so successful?" (Kepnes, 2014, p. 7). Later, he comments, "Nobody buys paper books anymore" (Kepnes, 2014, p. 67). These statements underscore that the contemporary readership has immersed itself in the online realm with e-textuality, proving more appealing to young generations. The transition to e-textuality in cyberculturalism is not confined to the immateriality of texts online. In these novels, Egan and Kepnes explore the ways in which the virtual world can bleed into the real world as the characters seamlessly oscillate between the physical and virtual worlds. They portray fictional representations of virtual reality and their effects on their characters in online platforms.

Similarly, Ernest Cline's novel *Ready Player One* (2011) unfolds in a world where individuals inhabit a virtual reality realm, called the OASIS. This fully immersive virtual world is accessed through special headsets and haptic suits and looks so realistic in three dimensions that users lose sight of its computer-generated nature and skip the grim realities of the real world via virtual escapism. Growing up in this environment, Wade gains early exposure to the OASIS. His prowess in cyberism enables him to earn a living by repairing malfunctioning OASIS consoles from early childhood. As he declares,

I spent a big chunk of my childhood hanging out in a virtual-reality simulation of Sesame Street, singing songs with friendly Muppets and playing interactive games that taught me how to walk, talk, add, subtract, read, write, and share. Once I'd mastered those skills, it didn't take me long to discover that the OASIS was also the world's biggest public library, where even a penniless kid like me had access to every book ever written, every song ever recorded, and every movie, television show, videogame, and piece of artwork ever created. (Cline, 2011, p. 13)

The passage shows that the protagonist spends a significant portion of his life in virtual realms wherein he acquires essential skills. The OASIS also serves as a digital library, which provides the character with access to its cultural, media, and entertainment products. Such a virtual reality world minimizes physicality, and the characters no longer need to personally visit libraries, cinemas, and theaters.

The transition from physicality to virtuality enables users in the OASIS to adopt fake identities. For instance, Mr. Avenovich, an online World History instructor, is a petite Inuit woman residing in Anchorage, Alaska. In the OASIS, she adopts an alternate ethnic and gender identity, "appearance and voice to make her students more receptive to her lessons" (Cline, 2011, p. 46). In a similar vein,

Wade's friend, Aech, who is a black lesbian, represents herself as a young, straight white man in the OASIS. Aech informs Wade that her Black mother always urged her to pass as a white man to enhance her chances of success, and the anonymity provided by the OASIS facilitates her passing. As Wade notes, "You could create an entirely new persona for yourself, with complete control over how you looked and sounded to others. In the OASIS, the fat could become thin, the ugly could become beautiful, and the shy, extroverted. Or vice versa. You could change your name, age, sex, race, height, weight, voice, hair color, and bone structure" (Cline, 2011, p. 57). Such cyber environments allow users to stylize their identities as they wish and liberate their digital avatars from the constraints of their real bodies.

Like Cline's *Ready Player One*, Neal Stephenson's novel *Snow Crash* (2017), which takes place in a dystopian future, explores the consequences of a hyper-connected virtual reality space, named the "Metaverse." In the Metaverse, people can craft avatars that serve as their virtual representations. As a result, "The people [become] pieces of software called avatars. They are the audiovisual bodies that users utilize to communicate with each other in the Metaverse" (Stephenson, 2017, p. 43). In addition, Stephenson scrutinizes the impact of cyberism on users' social relationships and identity. As he says, "Your avatar can look any way you want it to, up to the limitations of your equipment. If you're ugly, you can make your avatar beautiful. If you've just gotten out of bed, your avatar can still be wearing beautiful clothes and professionally applied makeup" (Stephenson, 2017, p. 43). Thus, in the Metaverse, users are free to adopt any identity they wish, blurring the boundaries between physical and virtual worlds. This phenomenon raises serious concerns about the lack of identity verification in virtual spaces and the role of virtual reality in shaping our sense of self.

Snow Crash also suggests that cyberculturalism can both liberate and control users. On one hand, the freedom to assume alternate identities in the virtual world grants users a sense of liberation, and on the other hand, the same freedom renders them vulnerable to manipulation, deceit, fraud, and insult by other users. For example, with the possibility of fake identities, some characters abuse their cyber knowledge to gain power and wealth. Through incorporating elements of hacker culture, the novelist draws readers' attention to the rise of cybercrime, which has emerged as a major concern in cyberculturality. The antagonist of the story, L. Bob Rife, is a hacker who employs a virus to gain control over the minds of fellow users. Through the villain's nefarious actions, the narrative draws attention to the potential of digital technology as a means of control in the hands of some criminals. With the emergence of criminal activities in the virtual world, the operation of MetaCop becomes imperative. In one case, MetaCop investigates a user, accused of credit card fraud. Their handcuffs are also "cybernetic brand of handcuffs" (Stephenson, 2017, p. 62), signifying

a transition from physicality to virtuality wherein robbers have been transformed into hackers, and policemen into MetaCops.

Users' ability to alter their identities prompts inquiries into the role of technology in reshaping their self-perception and self-deception. As the protagonist in Cline's novel informs, "People rarely used their real names online. Anonymity was one of the major perks of the OASIS. Inside the simulation, no one knew who you really were, unless you wanted them to" (Cline, 2011, p. 27). In this virtual world of anonymity, the protagonist then develops a cyber-crush on Art3mis solely based on her avatar image. As he confesses, "I knew the crush I had on Art3mis was both silly and ill-advised. What did I really know about her? She'd never revealed her true identity, of course. She could be fifteen or fifty. A lot of gunters even questioned whether she was really female, but I wasn't one of them" (Cline, 2011, p. 34). The confession reiterates that even love becomes virtual in cyberculturality, and people fall in love with each other based on fabricated identities. Later, Wade discovers that the persona Art3mis has portrayed online was not truthful. As he says, "How could he—*she*—deceive me all these years?" (Cline, 2011, p. 322; original emphasis). In the meantime, there happens some conflicts between the cyber-lovers, and Art3mis cuts off all her contact with him. She blocks him immediately, showing how friendship can be rootless and transient in virtual environments.

3. Man-Machine Symbiosis, Smart Technologies, and Governmentality

A number of contemporary writers explore the theme of man versus machine and their symbiotic relationship, which is a trait of post-postmodernism. This thematic exploration reflects the complexities of this relationship, examining how humans interact with and benefit from technology, while also raising questions about the extent to which humans lose agency in this cybercultural landscape. In Cline's *Ready Player One*, Wade voices this concern about man versus machine as such: "*It's just you against the machine. Move with your left hand, shoot with your right, and try to stay alive as long as possible*" (Cline, 2011, p. 12; italics in original). In his "unending battle" with machines, he is the loser, and his "two-least-favorite words appear on the screen: **GAME OVER**" (Cline, 2011, p. 12; bold letters in original). The human-robot collaboration, as portrayed in the novel, aims to make humankind a more competent creature; however, excessive reliance on machines at all times leads to the atrophy of certain skills. As Jana Vizmuller-Zocco foresees, "technological innovations will bring about the moment at which machines become more intelligent than humans and therefore cause a possible demise of *Homo sapiens*" (2013, p. 50). Based on this hypothesis, technological advancement is an inevitable force in post-postmodernity, wherein increased machine capabilities surpass humans and threaten their anthropocentric thinking.

The employment of smart technologies, which manifests man-machine collaboration, minimize our demand for communication with other people in cyberculturality. Geolocation services, like Google Earth, also enable people to virtually navigate and walk in streets, alleys, and landscapes across various countries, cities, and villages. Prior to the advent of cyberculturalism, visitors to places such as museums had to physically visit those sites and rely on tour guides, written materials, and/or video-audio instructions for information. Thanks to advancements in cyberculturalism, individuals can now enjoy digital multimedia tours and virtually explore such cultural heritage sites from any location and at any time, zoom on exhibited paintings and objects, watch and listen to curators and accompany them from site to site. However, as Christopher K. Brooks notes, when the actual gives way to the virtual, all our “five senses [...] cannot be found so readily in cyberspace” (2013, p. 150). In my own noveramatry (a combination of novel, drama, and poetry), entitled *M.animal and M.other: A Noveramatry* (2023), Cross, the protagonist, who is malformed and fears people’s reactions toward “hirself” consistently remains indoors, relying on geolocation apps to explore various places of “hir” interest. However, as the noveramatry reads, “Despite the trauma, s|he really wished to walk in real shopping centers, university campuses, and public libraries. S|he had always done it virtually; however, virtual visits did not satisfy hir at all, simply because s|he could not use all of hir five senses” (Ghasemi, 2023, p. 52). The yearning highlights the importance of sensory engagement with real-world sites.

By the same token, the Google system, AI, and ChatGPT enable users to find answers to their questions and solve problems. In the same noveramatry, I employ ChatGPT as a character, who acts as a company for Cross, the genius but isolated character because of “hir” physical abnormality. ChatGPT is always present, especially when s|he encounters a problem or feels lonely. Likewise, in Chinelo Onwualu’s short story, entitled “What the Dead Man Said” (2019), the main unnamed character always uses AI to facilitate his life, find ways for his challenges and even monitor his neural and physical conditions. As a result of his dependent on AI, he gradually loses some of his skills and faculties. Man’s dependence on machine is also presented in Joshua Mehigan’s poem “The Google.” The poem reflects on the power of Google as a source of knowledge. The speaker notes that “the Google knows more than we do,” and that it has become an indispensable tool for navigating the world. Then, the speaker takes a more critical view of Google and its profound impact on our lives. The speaker notes that Google has become a kind of digital oracle, shaping the way we think and feel. The speaker asks, “What will we think when the Google tells us what to think?” and “What will we say when the Google tells us what to say?” (Mehigan, 2013), suggesting that we have become so reliant on Google that we are losing our ability to think independently and communicate effectively. It is Google that—as a powerful tool—directs our mindset.

Another defining feature of cyberculturalism is the widespread use of smartphones, which play a key role in various aspect of our lives, including banking transactions, social media engagements, etc. The importance of smartphones is depicted in Kepnes's *You* when the main character loses his phone, and his life is crippled for a while. During that period, he is also concerned about the misuse of his device by the finder. As he says, "If someone does have it, I'm a poor MFA candidate with debt. Who's stealing that identity" (Kepnes, 2014, p. 45). It is worth noting that in post-postmodernity TV, radio, and regular phones—as prevalent telecommunication media in postmodernity—have been replaced by smartphones and tablets, and while TV, radio, and regular phone were communal devices, used by all members of families, cell phones, tablets, and laptops serve as ubiquitous private and lone devices, which require passwords or biometric authentication methods to open and use. In addition, in postmodernity, audience were merely consumers of programs, while in post-postmodernity, apps, social media platforms, and AI generator tools¹ have made users producers, and accordingly, numerous audios, videos, images, and textual contents are produced and uploaded every day (Ghasemi, 2024, p. 325). In today's cybercultural climate, content creators no longer require the technical tools, studios, and expertise once essential for producing movies and radio programs. Moreover, the quarantine approach, such as wide censorship, content filtering, and media blackout, which was used in postmodernity to control the flow of information, is no longer applicable in post-postmodern era. Hence, the traditional control mechanisms are ineffective in the cybercultural interconnected world.

However, imperceptible governmentality, which is another trait of cyberculturalism, is conducted with the employment of digital technology, social media monitoring, data mining via apps and devices, along with cameras and smartphones. In his novel, *Satin Island* (2015), Tom McCarthy draws our attention to this prevalent phenomenon when he writes:

Walk down any stretch of street and you're being filmed by three cameras at once—and even if you aren't, the phone you carry in your pocket pinpoints and logs your location at each given moment. Each website that you visit, every click-through, every keystroke is archived: even if you've hit *delete*, *wipe*, *empty trash*, it's still lodged somewhere [...]. Nothing ever goes away (McCarthy, 2019, p. 123; original emphases).

¹ In cyberculturality, AI generator tools are increasingly employed by writers to produce literary works, and this raises a multitude of questions concerning the literary value of such works and creativity of their producers. It is my contention that there is a huge difference between works produced by amateur and professional writers using these tools, and it is unjust to dismiss *all* such works as lacking creativity. To address this issue, I hereby propose "technocreative disdain fallacy," which refers to the dismissal of *all* literary works produced by AI generators as literary works devoid of creativity.

As the passage shows, every action undertaken by users in the virtual world is subject to surveillance. As Katherine D. Johnston truly states, “most consumer users are well aware that Facebook, Google, or any given Internet platform is overseeing their communications and usage, but they might be unaware of the extent to which their data is visible to third parties, including paramilitary and law-enforcement agencies” (2017, p. 161). Despite the ephemeral nature of activities and searches on the internet, all data is archived and remains retrievable, and even after deletion, digital footprints persist.

As Stephenson shows in *Snow Crash*, even employers use imperceptible governmentalities, and they take distance from physical surveillance approaches. For instance, to control their pizza Deliverators, the managers install smart and ubiquitous surveillance tools into pizza boxes. They insert:

a little LED readout glowing on the side, telling the Deliverator how many trade imbalance-producing minutes have ticked away since the fateful phone call. There are chips and stuff in there. [...] Each pizza glides into a slot like a circuit board into a computer, clicks into place as the smart box interfaces with the onboard system of the Deliverator’s car. The address of the caller has already been inferred from his phone number and poured into the smart box’s built-in RAM. From there it is communicated to the car, which computes and projects the optimal route on a heads-up display. (Stephenson, 2017, p. 6)

The insertion of the chips in the pizza boxes optimizes the Deliverators’ work efficiency and speeds up delivery times. Moreover, the Deliverators benefit from the navigation systems, which presenting customers’ addresses on their cars’ windshields. This is a transition from hardware to software as well as the integration of hardware and software.

4. Self-publication, Social Media, and Cyber-literature

The advent of cyberculturalism has facilitated the publication and dissemination of literary works. As Inderjeet Mani notes, “new developments in computer technology have made it possible for anyone to publish content in a variety of new media” (2010, p. 2). By the same token, Leonardo Flores writes that “the web has returned the means of production to individual authors and encouraged a DIY (do-it-yourself) self-publication” (2021, p. 37). In post-postmodernity, multimodality is also active in publication venues, and it dismantles publishing monopoly. Multimodality in publishing industry means that authors and subgroup writers, who have had difficulty breaking into print by commercial and traditional publishers, now have a variety of other means to release their texts. Thus, “in post-postmodernity, writing is no longer about publishing but writing, and owing to diversity of publishing outlets, one can find a publishing venue” (Ghasemi, 2022, p. 23). Hence, in such cybercultural environments, “where the Internet makes it possible for anyone to be a publisher” (Gustafsson, 2010, p. 8),

writers have the possibility to release their works via “untraditional literary venues” (Tanasescu, 2024, p. 1) such as self-publishing outlets, social media platforms, blogs, vlogs, moblogs, podcasts, Twitterature, etc.

When released on such digital platforms, literary works are instantly disseminated worldwide and reach a broader audience compared to traditional print-centered outputs. This accessibility means that digital literature can be enjoyed by web-savvy people who prefer digital media for its convenience and ease of access. However, this raises concerns about the quality of texts released in such self-publishing or independent venues and how they are perceived by readers and critics. It might be said that the democratization of content creation in digital platforms might lead to a glut of unfiltered and low-quality material or “brain rot” phenomena, and based on this, all such works are rejected. Here, I wish to propose a new fallacy, so-called “dismissal fallacy,” reflecting the belief that *all* works published through self-publishing or independent platforms are inherently inferior in quality or value and should be dismissed, simply because they lack the endorsement of traditional publishers and their associated critics.

The omnipresence of social media in the post-postmodern era has garnered attention from contemporary authors. It has dramatically affected reading, writing, and publishing literature and has become a new platform for releasing and reading literary works in part or whole. While distancing themselves from the strict principles of traditional publishers, writers can interact directly with readers through replies, comments, and retweets, fostering a sense of collaborative storytelling environment (Ghasemi, 2024, p. 314). Moreover, the pervasive influence of social media on society has not gone unnoticed by contemporary authors, and consequently, a number of writers have explored the theme of social media in their literary works. One notable example that prominently features social media is Tara Isabella Burton’s *The Social Creature* (2018). The novel is a captivating exploration of the intricate relationship between social media and literature, and as such, it is a significant contribution to the growing body of cyberliterature that explores its ever-evolving relationship with social media platforms.

At the core of Burton’s novel lies the idea that social media is changing how we imagine and perform our identities, which is what the major characters do in their construction of online identities that are divergent from their offline realities. For Louise, a poor social media assistant, her online identity is a channel of escape and provides her with a world of glitz, excitement, and social status, as opposed to the dreary life she endures. Conversely, Lavinia, a rich socialite, uses social media as a way of carrying on the fantasy of inspecting her own popularity and social elite influence. The novel is a relatively straightforward story, yet as Louise absorbs her fascination with Lavinia and her glamorous identity, it leads to a deadly game of social competence and pretension. Through a series of distorted events, the two women find themselves in each

other's arms, playing a game of deceit and secrecy while needing to find a way of maintaining their online images and social standing. The novel is intended to be a social commentary on the complicated and sometimes dangerous world of social media and relationships online. An illustrative instance occurs at the beginning of the novel when Lavinia and Louise take a selfie together, destined for posting on Facebook:

[Lavinia] turns the phone to Louise. "Which filter do you like?" Louise doesn't recognize herself. Her hair is sleek. Her lips are dark. Her cheekbones are high. She's wearing a flapper dress and she has cat's eyes and fake lashes and she looks like she's not even from this century. She looks like she's *not even real*. "Let's go with Mayfair. It makes your cheekbones look shiny. Christ—look at you! Look. At. You. You're beautiful." Lavinia has captioned the photo: *alike in indignity*. Louise thinks this is very witty. Louise thinks: *I am not myself*. (Burton, 2018, p. 2; original typography)

As seen, the characters employ various filters to manipulate their images and become increasingly entangled in their web of deception. In this light, the novel raises important questions about the impact of social media on our sense of self, the ethical considerations surrounding its use and the dangers of online manipulation in cyberculturalism.

Likewise, "Mini posts every photo she's taken that night. She tags Lavinia in all of them. Me and bae, she writes, with a dancing fox emoji and a wiggling Hula-Hoop girl emoji and a cat that rolls over and over doing somersaults, like anybody even says bae anymore" (Burton, 2018, p. 14; original typography). Yet in another post, Mimi uses a fox emoji and then types: "I'm all alone. did u go off w/ luis? are u ok?????! 111" (Burton, 2018, p. 101; original typography). Here, Burton shows how social media has affected our writing styles in cyberculturality, too, marking the transition from formal to informal, verbose to telegraphic, and words to emojis. The inclusion of emojis in contemporary literary works exemplifies how manifestations of social media have permeated into our language expression, reflecting the evolving communication norms of the digital age.

In Gail Honeyman's debut novel *Eleanor Oliphant Is Completely Fine* (2017), the protagonist Eleanor avoids using telegraphic and informal language in her communications at first. She even holds a disdainful view towards those who utilize the informal language, accompanied by emojis. Despite her initial aversion, she later finds herself influenced by the pervasive use of informal and telegraphic language and begins to adopt similar language patterns, reflecting the impact of her surroundings on her communication style. Honeyman also portrays how characters frequently share updates on their status and emotions through posts on social media platforms and highlights the consequences of exposing the intricacies of our private lives to the public. For example, Eleanor, who has a crush on a musician, monitors his daily life activities via his posts on

his social media platforms and even manages to find the location of his residence through a photo posted on his Twitter. As she informs:

Finding out where the musician lived had been easy. He had posted a picture of a lovely sunset on Twitter:

@johnnieLrocks

The view from my window: how lucky am I? #summerinthecity #blessed

It showed rooftops, trees and sky, but there was also a pub in the corner of the photograph, right at the end of the street, its name clearly visible. I found it in seconds, thanks to Google. (Honeyman, 2017, p. 63; Italics in original)

This demonstrates how our presence and posts on social media platforms can evoke concerns about our privacy and security and blur boundaries between public and private spheres.

Emma Lord's novel *Tweet Cute* (2020) revolves around social media and its challenges. From the perspective of cyberculturalism, *Tweet Cute* can be viewed as a reflection of the ways in which social media has become an integral part of our lives. In this novel, the online world is depicted as a fantastical domain where witty banter, creative memes, and savvy marketing strategies can solve almost any problem. The two main characters, Pepper and Jack, are presented as individuals deeply entrenched in social media, using their online prowess to establish a successful business, promote their personal brand, foster professional connections, and improve their public perceptions. However, a central theme of the narrative revolves around the dichotomy between the online and offline self, which is pertinent within the realm of cyberculturalism. In parallel, Lord's novel discloses the adverse effects of social media such as cyberbullying, online harassment, proliferation of fake news, and hate speech, and highlights their detrimental impact on users' well-being and mental health. The novel shows that such pernicious features of social media cause and perpetuate a cycle of increased anxiety, depression, jealousy, and social isolation. In this light, the novelist neither vilifies nor glorifies social media, but rather, acknowledges its benefits and potential pitfalls.

In a similar manner, A.V. Geiger's novel *Follow Me Back* (2017) represents the idea of social media as a double-edged sword. Social media platforms like Twitter and Instagram can provide individuals with feelings of belonging and connection, particularly with people who would otherwise be lonely or isolated. Tessa, for one example, finds solace in her virtual connection with fellow fans of pop idol Eric Thorn, seeing her Twitter account as a space where she can be herself and connect with others who can pass her by in real life. Tessa uses her fan fiction and virtual persona throughout the novel as spaces to disclose things about herself that she feels are inaccessible to everyone else. By writing about Eric and other popular culture icons, she exercises her own desires and emo-

tions in a setting that feels safe and anonymous. Anonymity and non-accountability are promoted by the book as invitations to engage in dangerous or abusive behavior that can have devastating consequences. But as the novel progresses and Tessa's virtual life begins interfering with her actual life and identity, she is confronted with the limitations of her online persona and the need to form a more genuine sense of identity. Similarly, Eric himself uses social media to interact with his fans and ask for their input to increase his profile as a famous artist. It is to be noted that, unlike traditional media, such as radio and television, social media and the internet allow for immediate comments, criticism, and feedback of the users. In this interactive environment, writers can also participate directly with readers, and their interaction with readers makes it easier for a collaborative culture of writing.

In *Follow Me Back*, Geiger does not sugarcoat the negative aspects of social media. As Tessa's obsession with Eric deepens, for instance, she finds herself more and more preoccupied with his online persona, poring over his Instagram and Twitter posts in search of hints about his character and life. When Tessa starts having hallucinations and starts to believe that Eric is in danger, this obsession takes a dangerous turn. A sense of connection is provided by following Eric, but it also fosters unhealthy levels of obsession and dependency. Simultaneously, Tessa starts to receive online harassment from an anonymous user going by the handle @EricThornSucks, which makes her wonder if the risk of her online relationship with Eric is worth it. In this light, anonymity can serve as a weapon in the hands of some users to launch violent assaults against others who have different orientations. This issue is pronounced for women, who are more vulnerable in cyber environments.

These literary works exemplify various aspects of cyberculturalism in the post-postmodern era, showcasing the multifaceted ways in which writers are addressing the intricate and sometimes disquieting realities of our digitally interconnected world. With themes such as the influence of social media on identity, the dangers of online anonymity, and the destabilized differences between the virtual and the real, these works provide an insight into the complexities of contemporary cyberculture. In addressing these themes, authors give readers a greater awareness of the widespread influence of technology on our lives and the evolving nature of human interaction in the era of cyberculture.

5. Conclusion

As an evolving and rapidly developing field that is reconfiguring our reading, seeing, writing, and publishing of literature, cyberculturalism has transformed traditional literary practices. It has opened new paths for literary innovation and electronic experimentation. Through the application of digital media, writers have unleashed unparalleled potential for fiction-making that cohere with the communication and interaction habits of the digital environment. The use

of multimedia features in web fiction suggests the potential for interactive, dynamic narratives that examine how technology impacts our lives and relationships. As digital media continues to grow, authors are now pushing boundaries of new forms and modes and engaging readers in new and novel ways. This is leading to a new kind of literary culture, one that is increasingly blurring the lines between physical and virtual realms.

Moreover, with its use of multimedia elements, collaborative approach, and wide accessibility, cyberliterature can reach sizeable and diverse readers. Digital technologies, through cyberculturalism, have enabled global connectivity by bridging geographical differences and differences in time. This has led to new social phenomena, including social networks and virtual communities, which have emerged as strong means of socialization, support, and information sharing. The cyberliterary aesthetic in this context is indicative of the fears and worries of virtual world digitized. With their detailed descriptions of the power of social media, the chosen literary texts provide meaningful analysis of how our lives and identities are shaped. They also point to the requirement for critical thinking and moral considerations in internet interactions. Besides, they show the dual nature of digital technology and social media, connecting and disconnecting us from one another and reconstituting our experiences, knowledge, and practices of life. With advancing digital technology, cyberculturalism in literature will increasingly play a part in reshaping the world of literature in the future.

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