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## Can Post-Literature be a Complete Art Form in this Digital Era

**Snehashree Mandal**

*Author Bio:* Snehashree Mandal is an author with two books in her name on Amazon: *A Hiatus from the Loaded Past* and *Five Lotuses and the Morass*.

Primary Contact email id: [snehashreemandal1@gmail.com](mailto:snehashreemandal1@gmail.com)

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### Abstract

*Post-literature is a term, first coined by Severin Constantin in 2003. The purpose of this paper is to analyze the development of scripts and continuous evolution of literature before the period of post literature from the time humans began writing for the first time. The article is also going to analyze the development of art & literature even in the period of post-literature and the various tools it can use to devise a complete art in this digital era. Also, we explore when exactly in history scripts and languages did began becoming literature. There are several evidences pointing to an understanding that post-literature art and literature can take the shape of a complete art form. However, more studies will be needed in this aspect, and more research must be done to understand exactly when post-literature turns into a complete art form.*

Storytelling has always been a fascinating, entertaining journey since the time of hunter-gatherers. From oral tales among small bands, the emergence of literature began (Sugiyama 2017). In fact, it is found that when Homo sapiens arrived 200,000 years ago, language was already well formed (Pinker 1994). It is found Ju/'hoan (!Kung) that bushmen hunter-gatherers used to night talk by the firelight. It portrays our appetite for stories and our necessary curiosity targeted to learn more from each other (Weissner 2014).

Humans fell to acquiring knowledge, and it must have begun primarily as a means of survival. Acclimatizing to a typical climatic condition required thorough knowledge of the topography in which they were choosing to make their homes (Tooby & DeVore, 1987). Simultaneously, they lacked basic protection bestowed upon animals by Nature vis-à-vis claws, fur, sharp night vision, speed, and strength, power to camouflage, strong jaws, and sharp teeth. The primitive Homo sapiens might have concluded their total survival rested on their ability to constantly gather knowledge to keep reinventing more around their micro niche (Barrett et.al., 2007).

Primitive humans required the basic knowledge, and skills of survival from somewhere or someone. Thus began the colonization of humans and the simultaneous copying of activities through generations. Humans thus became problem solvers and turned to each other for information (Kaplan et.al., 2000). Information was the most vital resource for humans, and it became the weapon that could help them access other resources (Tooby & Cosmides 1990).

From oral transmissions to a condensed recording of essential knowledge; it was the first step towards organizing and structuring the work. How did it happen? The physical basis of writing and drawing are similar, and it was non-existent during the Early and Middle Old Stone Ages, and only with the coming of the later old Stone Age (Upper Paleolithic, circa 30,000 to 10,000 BC) did graphic forms become prominent, as can be seen from three primary locations (the caves of southwestern France, the rock shelters of Southern Africa, and the birch bark scrolls of the Ojibway of North America). We see all forms – iconographic,

metonymic, associational, pictograms, logosyllabic, and alphabetic/syllabic - developing throughout history (Goody, J. 1987).

As deciphered by a study, the caves of Bhimbetka and Edakkal already had imprints of the Swastika, the divine form of expression as Hindus largely believe. It also would mean that people knew more about writing as early as 10000 to 40000 BC since Swastika was recently referred to as a word in Brahmi and not just a mere symbol as has been portrayed by everyone for hundreds of years. If it is a word then it means the Brahmi script was part of our humanity much before we see all these other scripts taking shape (*Mandal, S., 2024*). From 1900 BC to 1700 BC, even the Harappan script in India was prolifically being used for communication, as has been observed by excavators, historians, and archaeologists alike (Kenoyer, J., & Meadow, R. (1826)). Even the Indus civilization seemed to have already been using a script dating back to 2600 BC to 1800 BC. They used the pictographic script and have some 3500 surviving specimens still.

From drawing to writing, what kind of transitions do we see? To put anything in writing, a language and a script in it were to be formed first. The language we speak and believe, depicted through our writings, is somewhat an experimentation some of our ancestors must have done. They formed ways to divide a single word into many syllables and invented ways to put these sounds into a writing form. Mostly so, they created their own imagery and began terming them with a certain set of syllables. But whether it really depicts that particular sound or syllable is something they did not seem to have explored much. Accordingly, the graphic marks representing certain units within a specific language were first invented in the Near East, China, and Mesoamerica. You can see it in the cuneiform script from Mesopotamia (modern-day Iraq) from around 3200 ca which seems to be the first one. Before the cuneiform script, the system of counting and recording goods using clay tokens was all recorded. All of it gave way to pictography, syllabary, and alphabet illustration. Some argue that writing scripts emerged from counting and accounting, as it was used only for accounting purposes until writing became literature in the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC when Sumerians wanted to carve literature of writing for their practice of funerary inscriptions (James Wright, ed., 2014). We moved from tokens to pictography for accounting to logography (a transition from visual to aural), and then came the alphabets in 1500 BC. Alphabets were noted in the Near East during the third phase of the evolution of writing (Sass 2005).

According to a few experts, we also can note the development of alphabets in the Egyptian kingdoms (Ullman, B. L. 1927). It is being widely accepted, though, that the Proto-Canaanite consonantal alphabets were invented in 1500 BC. They were shown to have similar potential as was the Greek consonant-and-vowel alphabet arrangement (GOODY, J. (1983)).

However, there is also mention of writing in the early periods beyond 3500 BCE, and that dates back to 5300 BCE from Romania, as detected by radiocarbon dating, and when they first appeared, it was in Eastern Europe. Known as the Danube or Old European script, the tablets are being linked to Neolithic Turdas-Vinca cultures (4500-3700 BCE). If the signs on the tablets are recognized as part of a script, then it will date back further than the Mesopotamians. The three inscribed Tartaria tablets were found in a pit in 1961, and while Mesopotamian experts believe they were mere decorative, heraldic family emblems, others believe they contain pictograms similar to the ones in Djemet-Nas, as they were labeled as distinct symbols other than the common pottery symbols used around southeastern Europe in those times.

It was noted that the exchange of alphabets began no sooner than they were invented, and the first traces go back to the Greek exchange with the Egyptians around the 8<sup>th</sup> to the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC. They were not just

interested in the Egyptian grain but were also interested in the papyrus for writing their new alphabets. With a combination of papyrus and a vowel-and-consonant system in place, the first chances of unifying kingdoms by spreading literacy around the crowd became possible for the first time. It was a suitable opportunity to write down “Whisper down the alley,” a parlor game from taking wrong shades.

During 525 BC, Persians experimented with the alphabetical form of their cuneiform Old Persian script. But with Darius I, Cyrus’s second successor choosing Aramaic over this experimental script led to its decay. Surprisingly, Aramaic remained the lingua franca of the Middle East until Alexander’s conquest, and then when the Arabs overpowered it in the 7<sup>th</sup> century after Christ with Islam’s initial conquests.

While the scripts took shape and were shaped and reshaped by different civilizations and their transitions, the constant ongoing process of change remains documented in history. With the passage of time, words began to get inscribed on paper, and the first forms of literacy interestingly began using poetical elements to compile information together. Use of mnemonics filled with poetic structures like meter, rhyme, repetition, and use of stereotypical adjectives incessantly led to the slow progress of informational flow through the crowd.

The eventual years post the development of different scripts saw the formation of an era where frequent script changes in the world due to changing powers led to a large part of the crowd still being illiterate of ways that worked in that age for that particular king or queen. Storytellers were thus the only means to carry forward the information that was supposed to be transferred from one generation to another. The extraordinary retentive powers of these storytellers in oral societies were what led to holding countries together as per confirmations from the ethnographers and anthropologists in later years (Drucker, J. 2022). So began a journey of segregation, orientation, and mass-level education from the higher powers to prevent the common man from falling prey to the uprisings thereon, saving governments and standing as a whole kingdom in times of need. It was discovered in these times that language and the preferred scripts could work together to create a social force acting as an irreversible glue, binding powers to their pages. The modern world set out its modern practices following the erstwhile practices, thereby making way for an economically and socially stable world segregated through languages and scripts that together told different stories to different cultures and practiced what came to be popularly regarded as variations of one story form.

All of it gave way to the postmodernism and post-literature (the term “post-literature” was coined and published the same in February 2003 by Severin Constantin) era. But then there became a gap in the period being projected as post-literature and post-modernism. Interestingly, the inventor of the term, ‘post-literature’ also believes that all of the previous divine symbols can be put together into a set of alphabets like he has created and portrayed in his article.

#### **Difference between Post-Literature and Postmodernism: A Discussion**

The post-modern era was known to be the one that occurred soon after the modern era. Usually, the end of World War II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, the Cold War, and the Civil Rights movement led to the foundation of the post-modern era. New types of literary art forms found shape, and all of it came to the fore when the idea of rectifying the past to welcome the present took shape, impacting not just societies but also the modern literature practiced vehemently before the wars ensued. Post modern literature is a world primarily of metafiction, unreliable narration, self-reflexivity, and intertextuality (Renegar, V. R., & Dionisopoulos, G. N. (2011).

The late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries saw the rise of Dadaism among many that somehow challenged the authority of the authors and artists as a whole by highlighting the chances of whim, parody, and irony. A Dadaist poem would comprise a random collection of words being put in a hat, followed by the pulling out of words from it one by one. Collage was what got termed as a postmodern literature art form, or an impact of Dadaism, especially using specific elements from advertisements and illustrations from popular novels also took center stage. Surrealism and automatism became core structures of postmodernism art forms (Elger, D. (2004).

It was a welcome change from the world of 19<sup>th</sup> century's stark, realistic culture. It was also highlighted that both eras were focusing on subjectivism, yet, in modern literature and art forms, we could see a focus on more external realities, whereas in postmodernism we came across an examination of the inner self, the inner state of consciousness. The death of English novelist Virginia Woolf and Irish novelist James Joyce came to be seen as the rough boundary for the beginning of the postmodern era of art and literature.

On the other hand, the post-literature era is where the postmodern era comes to an end. Though there is not much of a demarcation, however, as per Severin Constantin, it is the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century that gave way to the post-literature era. Some also argued that postmodern literature was not separate from modern literature but instead was a reaction to modern literature.

What is in the loop as part of our first thoughts on the word from its originator? According to Constantin Severin, post-literature would describe the transformative tensions existing within the contemporary creation styles. There is constant merging of lines and concepts, and at the same time, a capability of coexistence surrounding the entire environment exhibiting the coming together of autonomous profiles – it is a period where fields are merging into each other, like technology, philosophy, and art that has developed the constant capability to merge into each other - during the post-literature era. The three chaoids merge into each other – the three realities born in the planes that pass through chaos (*Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari, 1998*). He further moves on to describe that where modernity is there to spatialize time, post-modernity re-temporalizes space; then post-literature would rather be termed as a rhizomatic literature – art from a postmodern point. He further concludes that Western Europe and the USA belong to the civilizations marveling on their spatial senses; Central Europeans are geniuses of time. Thus, the post-literature era, according to the author, would be nothing short of 'philosophical meditation; literature merged suitably with science/technology' (Severin, C. (2003)).

The 21<sup>st</sup> century gave way to an intriguing turn in the world of literature and art, where new forms of media emerged to supplement or complement the old. Digital narratives gained ground faster. There is an increase in the rise of multimedia storytelling, interactive narratives, and the integration of literature with different art forms like visual arts, virtual reality, and gaming. The domination of digital technology is what is ruling the creation of new forms of art that couldn't be thought of earlier. If we say the advent of computers gave way to the creation of the post-literature era, it wouldn't be wrong.

How exactly has the digital era transformed the sphere of literature?

Most say that literature has assumed a new form since the 1980s and thereby, through literary hypertexts and Twitterature, a new era of writers and authors took shape. Nowhere in the beginning could you notice such a huge number of people willingly expressing their ideas in writing except until the setting of the digital fall. The traditional single narrative and single-author forms underwent a revamp, and yet, the world of post-literature is still ever-expanding and ever-growing (Murray, S. (2018)).

In the era of post-literature, we have gotten introduced to new terms like audio book, ebook, interactive filmbook, and hyperbook. The printed book was the greatest media revolution, but now the dilution of it is clearly evident. In Great Britain, the rise of the novel is imminent in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the birth of the modern book market in Sweden in the 1830s and 1840s (Svedjedal, J. (2000)). In fact, the newspaper is showing a similar history, with the first newspaper being published in 1605 in Strasbourg, and before that, its handwritten predecessor, *Acta Diurna*, in ancient Rome around 59 BC. Television and radio were all means of expanding the world of art and literature.

In 1994, Sven Birkens brought out a book called “The Gutenberg Elegies,” where he lamented the fate of books in the digital age. However, despite such warnings, the market for books and art seemed to be ever-expanding and more prolific than ever. Where printing established cultural modernity, the world of audiovisual media established the concept of cultural postmodernity (Andrew Milner, 1996). The number of connected computers rose from two million in 1993 to 16 million in 1996. The digital revolution with digital bookshops like Amazon and desktop publishing gave a huge boost to this particular trade (Svedjedal, J. 2000). Digital technology has transformed nearly every aspect of our lives. The “sage on stage” to the multimedia for teaching, there is a drastic revolution of every form of life and living with the various forms and shapes of computers coming up (Marcum, D. (2014).

Is the digital era transforming into a language closer to our inner speech?

We see some interesting works in this line of thought – is the digital era taking us closer to our inner speech? The best way to look at it would be to believe in abandoning language as a category for ‘after language.’ Two reasons are cited by the author for doing so. The first is that the meaning of every word is inseparable from multiform ensembles like text, image, space, object, body, sound, and speech. The second reason is that the concept of language is a result of the aggregation of text and speech, and yet these must be considered separate from each other. It was deduced that image and space are closer to text and speech is closer to sound, body, and object. Instead, the author wants to suggest the adoption of transposition grammar. In it, the shifting of the meaning backward and forward will be easier across and between different existing forms. ‘There are five meaning functions that work together – reference, agency, structure, context, and interest.’ When you consider the functional perspective of the words, meanings are what keep moving and changing always- the one that stands to complement the others for the various different available peculiarities of the media. With the various multiform manifestations, any as well as every meaning will express a five-meaning function – reference, agency, context, structure, and interest. If you check the functional perspective, meanings are volatile and keep moving, shifting attention from one function to another. Thus, when using transpositional grammar, and with the account of meanings available, their very nature rests in the process of transformation when altered from form to form and from function-to-function (Kalantzis, M., & Cope, B. (2022).

By taking such a step, will we move closer to the real inner speech and form?

That will get decided by what we are serving on our platter. “A Talking Dog” or an external agent that could willfully change and alter the way we use different speech and forms. In short, by moving towards creating the large language models (LLMs), what are we visualizing as long and short term goals (Sejnowski, T. J. (2023))? Again, as we see that most relationships arise from communication, which nowadays has started being termed as “hyperpersonal communication (Walter, 1996),” we realize that even though their edit and re-edit options help us become more liked by people; on the other side, it does not necessarily change or alter the core truth about us and that revolves around who we truly are (Baym, N. K. (2015)).

Considering all of the above scenarios, we can safely say it's still undecided if there is a chance that the digital language, literature, and art transformation can take us closer to our real inner speech and form, even though we are slowly traversing, or rather could we say, we have clearly already become the four-dimensional human (Scott, L. 2015)?

What are the ways in which digitalization is transforming the literature landscape?

The next part that comes up, despite being unsure if the post-literature era is driving us closer to our inner real self; is that we are to surely know if at least digitization can or is transforming the literature landscape.

What have we gained from the growing digitization in the field of literature? Some would say it has expanded the horizon of literary expressions farther, fostering a culture of literary communities and improving research facilities to the core. The high technological interface is quite appealing to the modern artists who always wanted to break free from their 'avant-garde achievement honing predecessors' sitting around their parlor and living room writing cultures. Modern technology is efficient in the fragmentation and diversification of the master narrative and is also capable of offering different perspectives and fresh, non-negotiable vocabularies on everyone's platter. It is also allowing one to experience the direct experience of ambiguity, the ineffable, as well as the sensory and the mental landscape above, below, and beyond ideology. While the Renaissance gave us masques, pageants, and opera where everyone outside the box had to believe that the ravishing choreography and scenery was the ineffable truth, the early twentieth century brought something different. Wide, long, close-up, and montage shots, film languages, and the projection mechanism altered the way poetry, architecture, music, painting, and politics changed face. Cut, paste, juxtapose, layer, run simultaneity, the rhythm, and the contrast; all became discrete agents to disrupt and disturb the box culture (Salter, C. (2010)).

How digitization has shifted the effects of digitization on various different elements of content creation, distribution, reading habits, and above all, storytelling, is what is essential to understand. Even though it has democratized publishing and allowed the expansion of new forms of creative expression, it has sparked debates around changes in reading habits and experiences and the preservation of literary heritage. It is, however, noted that even though digitization has revolutionized the world of expressions, it has undoubtedly raised concerned eyebrows altogether. Several challenges of digitization are plagiarism, authorship attribution, text manipulation, and increased duplication of ideas and thoughts to the extent of mass generalization of them, thereby removing the impact of crediting a single person's activities and efforts. These are countered as multidimensional challenges, and they range from issues like authenticity and accessibility to the preservation and shifting of our reading focuses as well as experiences (Rani, Dr. S. (2020)). It is in all these aspects that we really witness the divergence of the literary ecosystem in the period of the post-literature era, as apt as the term coined by its creator, Severin Constantin.

Understanding if post-literature could develop into a complete art form stands as a crucial aspect at this stage.

Is it possible to transform the post-literature art process into a complete art form with the help of the available digital aids? Is it possible for post-literature to transform into a complete art?

1. Multimedia storytelling
2. VR and AR
3. Interactive Fiction and Games
4. Digital Art and Installations

5. Collaborative Platforms
6. Transmedia Narrative

All these newer modes and mediums of art forms are together altering the artistic landscape, contributing towards creating another world of literature and art.

In the literary domain, the visual arts and the rise and fall of immersive ideals are all connected to the aesthetics of illusion to depict the transparency of the medium. According to many, the 18<sup>th</sup> century had taken an ambiguous stance towards the concept of immersion by cultivating illusionist effects on one hand, through non-fictional narrative modes (memoirs, letters, and autobiographies) and on the other hand, they kept the narrative playful and intrusive, thereby quickly shifting one's focus from the story to the storytelling act. The language visibility, therefore, served as a barrier in the process, preventing readers from getting immersed in the story world. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it was believed that the story world was what majorly predominated the landscape of literature. Lyrical prose, cerebral use of word plays, puns, intertextual allusions, parody, and self-referentiality were some of the areas where literature flourished primarily. In terms of visual arts, immersion was brought in by a playful attitude towards the medium. It meant their mere exploitation would mean using graphic appearance, a cluster of related or unrelated senses, and even phonic substance of words being put together. In the early twentieth century, abstract shapes and colors on a canvas took shape within the two-dimensionality or got immersed in multiple perspectives of a cubist experiment. Immersive ideals made a comeback in the second third of the twentieth century with sharply delineated surreal dreamscapes, as was the case in the literary world. The Russian formalists are, however, of the opinion that the role of true art is to create a derangement from our original ways of thinking. It is considered to be the sole reason why major artistic innovations were often greeted with scandal – Symbolism, Dadaism, Situationism, and so on. Therefore, arguments arise if the digital art, is the one here to destroy all other previous forms and ways of creating art thereby moving towards the creation of an all-encompassing art form beyond its capabilities. Slow digitalization of the art world is being regarded as a constant movement of its dimensions towards dysfunctionality. Why is the art world so engrossed with the idea and concept of dysfunctionality? As per Kant, if art is nothing but all aesthetics and if aesthetics cannot be anything more than 'purposefulness without purpose,' then the only way a computer can become an art machine is if it is taken out of the world of business, work, and science and from our everyday lives. The question that arises at this level is then that digitization cannot be considered a complete form of art still (Ryan, M. L. (2015)). In this case, the question that would next need to be considered is, could the post-literature era be the future of the art and literature world?

What is the future of the post-literature world? Will there be a paradigm shift?

With the rise in digital art forms, even though it may not completely take the center stage towards becoming a complete art form on its own or might take a long while to become a complete art form, we still can explore the advantages that come together from its expansion. There are several advantages of the digital art form taking precedence over all other art forms in the current world.

- I. It will blur boundaries whereby everyone can witness a convergence of several kinds of art forms and media to generate a more immersive experience. It will become possible to intertwine literature, visual art, and music, as well as interactive media, thereby creating a dynamic and multi-sensory medium of storytelling (Nack, 2000).

2. Accessibility and democratization of work; delivering our efforts to the global audience is a cakewalk. With rapid democratization, we can also hear a wide range of voices and explore numerous perspectives on the same (Walton, 2016)
3. The post-literature era will emphasize increased interactivity, thereby allowing audiences to explore the same concept from different sides. Interactive fiction, virtual reality, and augmented reality create a deeper connection with the creator and the audience (Ryan, 2001). It proves there is a chance that digital art forms can take us closer to our inner voice, thereby making us more aware of ourselves than ever before.
4. When we use digital art forms, we work around the incorporation of different sensory elements like sound, visuals, and even touch. Therefore, it is quite obvious that post-literature, digitized art forms will establish stronger emotional responses, thereby creating an everlasting impact on their audience (Weisel, 2018).
5. The post-literature era will encourage pushing the boundaries of traditional storytelling. It will lead to the development of new genres, new techniques of storytelling, and newer forms of expression (Bolter & Grusin, 2000).
6. Digital art forms would be more sustainable than traditional media. It will drastically bring down the requirement for various physical resources used in paper and ink. Thereby, digital art forms will work to minimize environmental sustainability issues (Bollier, 2014). However, environmental concerns can only be mitigated up to a certain extent and not beyond.

Would all these advantages not work to make the digitalized, post-literature era a completely new and complete art form? We would either need to wait longer to witness the radical shift or we might need to find ways in which we can prevent such a shift from happening. The choice is open to every artist or literature enthusiast as to what they think could do good to the world of literature and art in the post-literature era. Also, it takes us back to our previous understanding, where moving forward and using all the available tools to improve human connection and knowledge sharing, and where it could lead us is where we want to see ourselves even in this post-literature era.

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