

Turn on literature

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Abstract:

How do you start a story? Open a page, flick a switch, move an object, touch a screen? With the digital development and new digital genres of literature libraries face new challenges as well as new possibilities. Authors are using digital media to push literature in new directions. But how do we communicate the wonders of the new genres that do not fit into the physical book's distribution pattern. The surfacing of new literary trends gives way to librarians to play a new role as editors, facilitators and curators.

3 libraries in Romania, Norway and Denmark have joined forces to “turn on literature” by creating 3 generative literature machines (poetry machines) and 3 acknowledged authors have written texts for the machines. All is a result of an unusual collaboration between libraries, digital developers, authors, university researchers with the help of EU-funding.

The poetry machines are designed to involve users in the creation of digital literature in the library space. Through a game-like interface the user combines the author's sentences into a poem, which will then be printed onto a library receipt creating an intermedial translation. At the same time, the poem will be projected onto projection surfaces in the other participating libraries making the installation transnational. The poetry machine translates the concept of e-literature into a tangible object (a printed poem) and transforms the solitary activities of writing and reading into a social undertaking since three simultaneous users can interact with the machine creating a poem together. The machine will be used in exhibitions at libraries and as a tool and in digital and media literacy workshops with young adults.

Keywords: digital literature, electronic literature, libraries

Digital technologies have an ever increasing importance in everyday life. This tendency has also spread to literature and resulted in new literary forms that challenge our ideas of what literature can be and look like. It creates new challenges for libraries regarding communication and exhibition of these literary genres.

How can libraries best introduce new digital literature?

The objective of “Turn on literature” is to find answers to this question.

The partners are approaching the field of digital literature through:

- the production of poetry machines designed to involve users in the creation of digital literature at the library
- digital literature exhibitions and workshops with young adults in Romania, Denmark and Norway
- the creation of a best practice kit targeted towards cultural professionals

Partners and Authors

Roskilde Bibliotekerne (Lead Partner, Denmark), author; Ursula Andkjaer Olsen

Bergen Offentlige Bibliotek (Norway), author; Morten Langeland

Antim Ivireanul Valcea County Library (Romania), author; Radu Vancu

The three partners are working closely with selected authors in order to create innovative presentations of interactive works of literature. The authors supply the words and sentences that enable users to create own digital poems interacting with the poetry machines.

The partnership will seize the opportunities that digital literature offers for audience development and will reposition the library to suit users’ needs in an increasingly digitised world. Target groups will be young adults and traditional book readers at the libraries.

Digital literature is an emerging field where authors combine language with the affordances of digital devices (such as computers, tablets, sensors, RFID chips, smart phones etc) to create contemporary literature. The three partners will work closely with authors in order to create innovative presentations of interactive works of literature and circulate the European works to the involved libraries. Exhibitions and capacity building events will secure that literature born in new media in the future will have a place to meet an audience.

The key components in doing this will be:

Production of interactive literature installations involving users in the creation of digital literature at the library. As part of our audience development plan the installations will be designed to be used in co-creation workshops with young adults.

Digital literature exhibitions. Making new European literature publicly accessible and giving traditional readers a new perspective on digitization.

Best Practice Kit – including material from capacity building workshops, exhibition videos, website and printed material – will work as a tool of dissemination of experiences and results and will be targeted towards cultural professionals.

The participating libraries and their collaborating partners will through the work with these key components increase their capacities and know-how in the field of digital culture.

The solid partnership formed in the project will be the foundation for the continued work to bring digital literature to an even larger audience.

The partnership will pave the way for the cultural sector to reach to new generations of readers and new ways of staying relevant. Turn on Literature brings European literature into the future – hand in hand with the readers.

Electronic literature

Literature is found in books - but not only in books. Today's writers rarely start the writing process by putting a pen on paper. They turn on the computer, and from the very beginning the written literature is merged with the digital. In that sense, almost all literature is digitally born. Only when published is the literature put into the book and sent to its reader.

But there is also a literature that remains digital and never gets printed as a book. A literature that uses new media to create brand new literary forms such as: textbooks, literary apps, visual writing, hypertext fiction, flash poems. The printed book format is no longer the only medium for literature, but just one of several.

The many digital literary forms can be gathered under the term digital literature, although there is not yet a broad consensus about the final term. Some speak of electronic literature, while others use Art Writing, New Media Writing or the technical: "Literature on a programmable media".

Digital literature is ...

Digital literature largely builds on already existing literary traditions such as the 60's modernism, cut-up techniques, dadaism and language experiments, represented, for example, by the French author group Oulipo. At the same time, the digital literature is cross-ethical and incorporates elements from the entire digital cultural sphere: graphic design, animation, sound and images, movies, games, programming and algorithms.

In other words, it means that there are a myriad of literary forms within the digital. The most interesting works almost create their own genres.

The Future

As digital media becomes more and more widely used, digital literature will also become more and more accessible. Computers and tablets are no longer foreign media for us. Readers have become media users who easily and elegantly jump around on the many digital platforms we have available.

Just as the digital media have helped push the development of digital literature, they also push our perception of literature. With the new interactive stories, we become more literary users than readers, and the authors must get used to telling stories with more than text.

The first works of digital literature were very experimental, but today it seems that digital literature is finding a broader appeal with the development of literary apps for all tastes.