NORMAN MAILER AND THE NOVEL 2.0[1]

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> There was probably no impotence in all the world like knowing you were right and the wave of the world was wrong, and yet the wave came on.
>
> Norman Mailer, *The Armies of the Night*

One of the most distinguishing characteristics of the digital age is its challenge to established systems of control. Nowhere has this change been more evident recently than the upheavals in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, Bahrain, Syria, and Libya. While the credit given to social media in these revolutions might be overstated, what social media websites like Twitter and Facebook represent expresses a fundamental shift in who controls communication. Traditional channels of media authority are finally being challenged by a new digital zeitgeist. In many instances, monolithic media forms have encountered a wave of digital literacy that, tsunami-like, washes away political, social, and economic structures that have stood for years.

As I write this, Muammar el-Qaddafi's state-run media organizations wage a narrative battle against the revolutionary forces of Facebook and Twitter while literally trying to crush a political rebellion. The former, an organization of old media forms like television, newspapers, and radio, obfuscate alternative views with official ones, while the latter allows a polyphony of challenges to attack this view, both inside and outside of Libya. While the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt were able to facilitate political change mostly through the media, Libya, Yemen, Syria, and Bahrain—and arguably Iran—must translate the battle of words into the material world.

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Many of these regimes are not afraid to back their one-sided propaganda with force, a tactic not uncommon for the despotic.

A similar battle has been waging for over a decade now, also precipitated by social media—that between the entertainment industry (supported by the government) and the consuming public at large (mostly young). The model of this industry is based on a physical product that can be controlled by the companies that own the copyright: publishing houses, the Record Industry of America (RIAA), and the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA). Distribution of entertainment has always been easily controlled by these megapowers, not only whose voice was sanctioned for publication, but how that voice was packaged and sold. Even the advent of new analog copying technologies becoming widely available to the general public beginning in the 1970s—the VCR and tapedeck—only succeeded in giving the powers-that-be more approved modes of distribution.[2]

It was not until the digital was combined with the Internet that the power of these entertainment corporations was challenged. The old model of distribution was based on a physical object that was easily quantifiable, controllable, and policed. The object—the *copy*—fit into the traditional economies of morality: it is wrong to steal. When you steal this object, you are depriving the owner of money, enjoyment, and his or her property. However, without the medium, this ethical narrative becomes tenuous—it just doesn't seem like stealing anymore. Indeed, the benefit of the digital copy is that making one is not only a perfect reproduction, it does not deprive the owner of his or her enjoyment.

The digital zeitgeist is a challenge of medium. Any student of Marshall McLuhan can tell you that "the medium is the message" (8). By this adage, McLuhan meant to call critical attention to the politics of medium—how it controls the ways users process their reality. McLuhan was not interested in content, but in how our use of the devices of communication (the media) shaped our lives and our perception of them. Most media before the digital did not allow for what Jean Baudrillard calls "response" (280). Media, he argues, do not facilitate a communication exchange because information flows one-way; therefore, the powers that control the media also control the message (Baudrillard 277–288). Watchers of television were in a controlled place at a stated prime time, and most importantly, they were isolated from each other. Not only were they given a message by the television, they re-

mained apart from the mob that might organize a resistance against this "forced socialization" (Baudrillard 283).

However, what happens when the medium disappears—when the order of the cathedral is abandoned by its apostates who now prefer the chaos of the bazaar? Eric Raymond's metaphor[3] refers to the open-source software movement, but it might be equally applicable to entertainment and now politics. The digital revolution has given everyone a voice that they seem unlikely to relinquish easily. Globally, humanity has responded to and will continue to respond to the media that has structured its lives to promote another's agenda. These tides seem to be increasing in number and force, seeking to wash the shore clean of its old monolithic structures. Yet, in the aftermath of such forces of nature, a sense of uncertainty often seems to frighten the newly freed into reestablishing structures of domination.

My interest here is inherently political, if not expressly. As a student of literature, I came to my discipline as many others did—reveling in the content, the thematic concerns of great narrative. However, I wonder how the authority of literature—particularly that of its dominant form, the novel—can withstand or should resist the tide of digital change?

A CRISIS OF INTERPRETATION[4]

After September 11, 2001, the United States has arguably entered a continuum characterized by the capitalist drive to "just do it." This mantra is a zeitgeist that emphasizes action over thought, movement over contemplation. A trend toward anti-intellectualism had been growing since the last century, and the fact of terrorism seems to have been the final blow, toppling American thoughtfulness along with the twin towers.

The mania that followed the figurative collapse of America with the destruction of its twin signifiers has brought about the literal collapse of the American economic system, especially for those who have historically been disenfranchised. There is a new world, the nascent and wily political and social movements seem to shout from the streets—one that must be engaged in a visceral way, not in an elitist, academic one. Just after 9/11, Stanley Fish's voice defending postmodernism—what he characterized as an academic theoretical position, not an ontological philosophy—seemed to be drowned out by the cries for vengeance, war, and a reassertion of American dominance (27–31). Those "smarties" in their rarefied academic atmosphere have made us all sissies—irreligious, immoral, feminine, and much too tolerant.

We need to regain control and drive the immoral behavior back in the closet if it cannot be obliterated all together.

America flexed its military muscle and launched two wars after 9/11 that have drained not only our coffers, but our social morale. These are not the only wars America has waged since 9/11, but there has been cultural war, too. Mailer points out in *Why Are We at War?* that the political right has used the terrorist attacks as an excuse to tighten America's chastity belt, to reassert those traditional values that privilege phallogocentric views and practices (52). America's empire is crumbling because it has lost its moral center (Mailer, *Why* 52). The only way to get it back is to institute a moral reform and eliminate the social evils of liberalism. America has lost its identity, and only through direct action can it get it back.

The crisis of identity that Mailer sees in America has brought about a further crisis of interpretation. Many of the attitudes vocalized by the right spring from the conservative pundits on the national "news" channels. Movements like the Birthers or the Tea Partiers (and now the Deathers) are strategically nothing new in partisan politics, nor are the talking heads that support them and feed their fires. One of the central aspects of old broadcast forms—television and radio, in particular—is that they fostered a culture of non-responsiveness, as Jean Baudrillard put it (281). He meant that the mass media are "anti-mediatory and intransitive," leaving no room for communication, response, or play. In these old forms, "power belongs to the one who can give and *cannot be repaid*" (Baudrillad 281). This has the consequence of forcing certain social attitudes; it tends to assure that people are not talking to each other and, Raymond Williams adds, leads to the privatized home, separate and distinct from decisive political and commercial powers (30).

Yet, while digital, social media might allow for a revolutionary response (Baudrillard remained dubious), it also leaves many of us afloat without a rudder on a turbulent sea. We are free, yes, but now at the hands of chaotic tides and devastating tempests. In much the same way as terrorism makes its victims flee back to the comfort of their safe houses, the current digital landscape provides a vertiginous amount of information, almost forcing us to focus our gaze on the *good-ol'-days* of narrower bandwidths. I can't help but think of Dostoyevsky's Grand Inquisitor's offer of miracle, mystery, and authority to the huddled, frightened masses. All one needs to do is leave his or her freedom at the door. Just do it.

As Langdon Winner observes in his essay "Mythinformation," the utopian aspirations of digital access often have just the opposite effect: an impotent paralysis in the face of overwhelming choice (594). Too much freedom is a terrifying prospect to those not used to it and underprepared for it. In the face of such a prospect, the masses seek succor in the traditional narratives of their fathers. How do we interpret too much choice? It is a loss of directions, values, morality, and sanity.

This crisis of interpretation has us retreating to the easily binary answers of good and evil, right and wrong, right and left. The problem with the polarities is that they sacrifice subtlety, nuance, and choice to the gods of certainty, righteousness, and privilege. The rallying call demands that the polyphony of voices be silenced by the one, true voice of certainty. In a time of crisis, we seem to seek the authority that can help us out of it. Don your tea bags—*We must act!*

THE NOVEL AND THE ORDER

Arguably, the dominant form of literature in the twentieth century was prose fiction, of which the novel was a titan, if not a god. Indeed, there is something god-like about the novel and its relation to Western Civilization's sense of identity and order. While the novel has its genesis in ancient prose texts, it didn't develop fully until certain intellectual and technological foundations were established. Since the Enlightenment, the novel has become an art form of, in Lukács's words, the "new world," a representative guide for the modern human seeking meaning in a cold universe (20). The novel, therefore, seems to be the medium of expression for a twentieth-century zeitgeist, fully developed during the modernist days of recovery from the intellectual revolutions of the turn of the century and the literal rubble of the World War I. And while the work of the modern novel was serious and sober, the postmodern novel's authority is, perhaps, ironic and blasphemous.

Thus far in the digital age, the novel stands defiant. While many seek a new art form for the digital age—a cyberbard or a collectively authored cybertext—the novel appears to still provide something we need. After all, the novel has been developed since the invention of written language. It is related to the epic, the romance, the novella, the picaresque and various modes of expression, the tragic, the comic, the moral, the licentious, the ideal, and the real. The novel's emphasis on a character's relationship to society and universe is traditionally told in a comfortable prose, in a language of verisimil-

itude that is comforting enough to allow the reader to engage new ideas. The novel, arguably, has become the medium of authority in the contemporary world, even despite the digital wave, perhaps because of its transparency. That is, the novel is its content as much as the dead trees it is printed on.

Perhaps the novel gives an order to life, particularly in the days following September 11, 2001, when America, as Mailer notes in *Why Are We at War?*, was going through an identity crisis (10). The fact of terrorism shatters the meaning of life and death, robbing our lives' order and replacing it with absurdity (18–19). The rest of Mailer's essay examines the aftermath of 9/11: in an attempt to rebuild the national ego, many Americans became "Flag conservatives," drunk with a mindless patriotism that sought to reassert itself through a jingoistic wave of moral cleansing (51). A tide of patriotism became a wave of American supremacy that sought empire, no matter the cost.

I would argue, too, that this struggle is expressed in the flow of the word. The digital word resembles the political anxiety of disorder and insecurity. With books, the word was solid, permanent, authoritative. With the Internet, words become tenuous, temporary, fleeting. Printing on dead trees provided a way to measure and judge the validity of the word because it could be held in the hand, put on a shelf, reliably referenced. The World Wide Web, too, opened up the flood gates of opinion, obfuscating the voices of authority by those of the masses: yes, the word gained more of an equality, but at the loss of the authoritative voice. In an age of print, achieving admittance into the world of publication was a Herculean task, but blogs now allow anyone with a computer to have a voice. These disparate voices represent for many the planes demolishing the towers of authority. While many revel in their newly found voices, many in America are left reeling and longing for the days of the few, sanctioned voices that could give them direction and order.

The problem with digital forms of art, especially literature, is that they seem to lack the necessary force of authority to provide them the structure that they need to fulfill the audience's aesthetic expectations. As Janet Murray points out in *Hamlet on the Holodeck*, audiences expect the guiding presence of the author to deliver a unified experience replete with all the accoutrements of narrative (204). Without the authority, the narrative ceases to be engaging because it lacks the singular focus or unifying vision that we expect from literary expressions. The digital challenges the established conventions of the literary, and while we have traditionally turned to stories for

a reflection of ourselves and for meaning, the digital explodes meaning into multiplicity (Murray 274).

It seems, then, that we are still in need of the author, maybe even more so as atoms turn to bits.[5] Perhaps this will be the cyberbard that Murray suggests might become the voice of the digital age, or maybe we aren't ready yet to dispense with the novel just yet.

MAILER AS NOVELIST

Norman Mailer saw the responsibility of the novelist as a double-edged sword: he must posit an authoritative vision of structure in form and content, yet always be aware that "no authorities exist that have certain knowledge" (Mailer and Mailer 218). This places the novelist in an ethical and existential position of great responsibility. One of Mailer's chief concerns seems to be with the notion of individual truth and how that truth can lead to creativity, order, and action.

Mailer equates God with the novelist, and vice versa. Like the novelist, Mailer's conception of the creator is an existential one: God is not all-powerful or all-good in Mailer's conception, but makes mistakes and tries again (Mailer and Lennon 7, 11, 13, 33). God as artist, it seems to Mailer, remains true to his vision and his own creativity, even though occasionally messing up. Like an artist, God evolves with creation; he "still has an unfulfilled vision and wishes to do more" (Mailer and Lennon 35, 22).

Mailer's Christ in *The Gospel According to the Son* is also a metaphor for the novelist: one, Mailer suggests, who does the best that he can under difficult, if not impossible, circumstances (Mailer and Mailer 214). Christ's voice is that of narrator and novelist, seeking through the "small miracle" of the text to "remain closer to the truth" in his account of his life (Mailer, *The Gospel* 4). He explicitly distances himself from the gospels and the intention of the scribes who seem to have their own agendas. The truth, therefore, is in his vision—one that is subjective and existential, although authoritative. He, like the novelist, seeks to uncover the truth, unlike others who would bury it for their own purposes.

The authority here is not necessarily with an account of factual occurrences, but with the narrative and its struggle for order and identity. These are battles Mailer seemed to fight his whole life and which kept him close to his vision of God, the model creator and authority. Yet, for Mailer, God was not properly "God," but a god among many that, like his narrator Christ in

Gospel and Mailer himself in *The Armies of the Night*, as they sought "to develop their vision of existence rather than accept visions from other gods opposed to them" (Mailer and Mailer 215). God is not all-powerful, but trying to do the best he or she can do against great odds.

Creation seems to come, then, from narrative, or to paraphrase Mailer's subtitle for *The Armies of the Night*: the novel is history and history is the novel.[6] It is less a true "novel" and more of a journalistic-novel hybrid. J. Michael Lennon, in "Norman Mailer: Novelist, Journalist, or Historian?" observes that *Armies* was written during the period of Mailer's career where he seemed to push the novel beyond its traditional limits, as if to be true to his own growth, the novel could no longer contain the truth that Mailer sought (94). He seems to suggest that the narrative order of the novel and the waves of history were connected inextricably and dynamically, that even "facts" become like fictions, as they seemed to do in Mailer's work during this period, perhaps most successfully in *The Executioner's Song*. Historical facts charged by the authoritative narrative of the novelist become, perhaps, closer to the truth than reality. There is a give and take: life is never as orderly as fiction, although everyday we attempt to impose our fictions upon it. Mailer states:

> I think in fiction, what we want to do is we want to create life. We want to give the readers the feeling that they are participating in the life of the characters they're reading about. And to the degree that they're participating in it, they shouldn't necessarily understand everything that's going on anymore than we do in life. (qtd. in Lennon 95–96)

Similarly, Mailer says elsewhere that when the great historian writes, he or she is also a writer of great fiction (Lennon 96). Lennon concludes that Mailer elevated the novel and the novelist as the true creative spirits, ones that pose difficult questions in order to provoke, to incite, and to contend. Whereas the historian and journalist work with pre-digested facts, intended to answer, to clarify, and to end debate (97). Mailer is not writing in an easily understandable prose for the masses; he is challenging readers to rise up to his level; this is not journalism or television—it is literature (Bufithis 90).

Yet, while the novelist is not limited by the facts of history, perhaps the novel itself is in Mailer's view—or at least the realities of identifiable historicity that remain the touchstones for communication and meaning. Mailer

seems to be calling out the fictional nature of all narrative, whether based on fact or imagination and, as Lennon avers, Mailer uses whatever form he needs to "carry the tale forward to the century's end" (101). In a way, as Laura Adams suggests, it is as if Mailer suspects that the novel is no longer capable of influencing people's consciousness as it did before World War II (100-101). Authority of the narrative seems to be linked to history, culture, and the artist's place in it: the narrative grows with the author/creator. The best novel, then, remains true to the novelist's vision at the moment of creation. This principle seems to be a moral imperative with Mailer, an imperative that forced him to push the boundaries of genre.

Another link between history and the novelist is the idea of the novelist as savior. Alfred Kazin sees Mailer as primarily a "moralist," one who has an "acute sense of national crisis" and a responsibility not to leave this crisis in the hands of the journalists (2). Mailer's authority as a novelist attacks what he sees as an American authority that is misplaced and oppressive. Mailer plays the social miscreant and the artist, asking questions, getting in the way, and forcing his own path through the middle of the conflict, both metaphorically and literally (Bufithis 87, 91).

Armies is a novel of opposition: political, aesthetic, and moral. Mailer's opposition in *Armies* holds contempt for the American military-industrial complex and its monolithic symbol is the Pentagon, but at the same time he also sees as his opponent the mediocrity of America's insipid middle class. His revolution in *Armies* is not just against American leadership, but also those forms that have become too tarnished by quotidian reality. "Opposition" might best describe Mailer's own aesthetic approach to literature, which informed the narrative of his public persona. The best oppositional tool of the time was Mailer's hybrid "novel," a genre that might have been pushed and stretched as far as it will go.

Further, Mailer might have been opposing the novel. After all, it is older than the Pentagon, and perhaps more ossified: more a symbol of authoritarianism than a challenge to it. The civil unrest of the 1960s demanded political and social change, and maybe *Armies* itself demanded a new literary medium.

THE WEB V. THE NOVEL

When I spoke at the Norman Mailer Society Conference in 2005, I was asked to discuss the position of literature and English Studies at the beginning of

the twenty-first century, how the work of Norman Mailer fit into these cultural and intellectual trends, and recommend ways that the Society might continue to flourish in a still incunabular information age. In 2005, books and the system that supported their publication still reigned supreme; thus in the US alone there were published 282,500 new titles, about 40,000 of which were fiction.[7] Also in the fall of 2005, The Facebook, a successful social networking site for colleges and universities, had just launched its version for high schools. It was still a year away from opening its digital doors to the world's Internet users, but it already showed the growing popularity of Web 2.0 applications and their integral foundation of community built on members' affinity. And in 2005 the world had not yet heard of an iPhone. Its launch would not be for another year and eight months.

I highlighted the growing disparity between our play on the Internet and our serious work as literary scholars and aficionados. I advocated flexibility and patience to help us through this transition from atoms to bits. I suggested that it is up to us canon builders to decide what is important, in Toni Morrison's words in *Beloved*, to "pass on" in both senses: that is, what needs to be preserved and emphasized for the coming generations and what it is we can safely leave behind. If anything, our digital lives, with their ever-increasing glut of information, blur this distinction not only for us, but especially for those who have never known a world without the Internet.

So at the end of this century's first decade, where are we? In the middle of March 2010, more people visited Facebook than Google,[8] and by July the number of active users on Facebook had grown to 500 million.[9] Facebook might be the apotheosis of the Web 2.0, but in its most insipid form. The idea of the Web 2.0 began as a reaction to static web pages. Its proponents argued that the web should be user-centered and less like the printed page. Sites should be dynamic, allowing users to participate, to contribute, and to collaborate. Websites should be only frameworks, giving users space and tools for sharing their affinity with photography, video, books, cooking, and any other topic they can think of. However, since my discussion of the Web 2.0 in 2005, something has shifted in its focus, and it might be blamed on Twitter, introduced in the summer of 2006. Twitter, as you know, allows users to follow other users' "tweets," or streams of SMS-like messages limited to 140 characters. Many users of Twitter attempt to focus on a topic, but according to Pear Analytic research firm, the dominant content of tweets is "pointless babble"—you know, the nonsense that makes up most of our lives.[10] About

Twitter, Bruce Sterling states, "Using Twitter for literate communication is about as likely as firing up a CB radio and hearing some guy recite the Iliad."[11] I would argue that Facebook seems to replace the topic-centered Web 2.0 with Twitter's "pointless babble," turning it into ubiquitous "social media."

In light of the Facebook revolution of the Web, even more voices are speaking out that lament the ostensible death of traditional literacy. More so, as the research of UCLA Professor of Psychiatry Gary Small suggests, reading the web is actually rewiring our brains. His findings will probably be no surprise to many:

> When we go online, we enter an environment that promotes cursory reading, hurried and distracted thinking, and superficial learning. Even as the Internet grants us easy access to vast amounts of information, it is turning us into shallower thinkers, literally changing the structure of our brain" (Carr).

Reading on the Web, probably the most popular form of reading done off a computer screen, is not the same thing as reading a novel. Something about the computer—even a laptop—inspires a cursory, quick, and superficial consumption of text. Perhaps it is because it looks more like a television than it does a book? Perhaps it is because we have to lean forward, rather than lean back (Anderson and Wolff)? Maybe we are trained that what comes to us through a monitor should be consumed in a certain way, whereas that which is found on leaves in cloth binding must be absorbed in another way. In many ways, books, especially novels, are like holy artifacts. Computers, to paraphrase Mailer, are machines of the devil.

I still hear people say that they can't proofread or edit on a computer screen. There's something about the printed word on a physical sheet of paper that allows our minds to take it more seriously than we would something appearing on a computer screen in a Web browser. Seriously, I am pretty sure I could never read a book on a PC.

Perhaps it is the notion that what we see on the computer screen is somehow transient and impermanent, that it can disappear with a flick of a switch or the press of a key. Books sit heavily on shelves. They are weighty matter that can be handled and not so easily disposed of. Until recently, the idea of publishing was like, in Gilgamesh's words, "having one's name stamped in

bricks." If you were mentioned by a poet, you achieved a kind of immortality. "Literature" deserves this treatment, after all. It *is* weighty. It matters. It should be in books, not on computer screens. Sven Bickerts in *The Gutenberg Elegies* echoes this sentiment: "our entire collective history—the soul of societal body—is encoded in print. Is encoded, and has for countless generations been passed along by way of the word, mainly through books" (20). Birkerts goes on to lament what he sees as an inevitable paradigm shift away from print to the digital (139). His observation seems to agree with Small's research: the Web is destroying our ability to read in a significant way.

Not only is our reading changing because of our digital lives, but also our writing. According to Virginia Heffernan of the *New York Times*, "Book publishing is simply becoming self publishing." Considering numbers from the Bowker bibliographic company, she reports that 764,448 book titles were produced by self-publishers, 45,000 of which were fiction titles. Inexpensive digital-publishing technologies and print-on-demand companies make professional-looking books, complete with dust jackets and ISBNs, within any aspiring author's reach. Waning are the days, too, of the stigma of the self-published, since many are finding commercial success without the hassle and frustration of dealing with the traditional publishing industry gatekeepers. Therefore, if anyone can publish a novel, is our access to digital technologies also destroying what we read?

These significant changes are not the only technical revolution to happen since 2005. Apple introduced the iPhone in January 2007, and the first model was available six months later. Not only has the iPhone made a significant shift in the cellular phone market, but it has also changed the way that many of us interact with our information, so much so that Anderson and Wolff of *Wired* recently proclaimed "The Web Is Dead." They argue that while information access is on the rise, how users get that information is changing from the Web to apps, like those Apple sells for its iPhone. These apps are smaller, sleeker, faster, and more specific to the task: they are about "getting," not "browsing." With technologies as push notifications, information that users want is delivered directly, rather than the user going out to find it. After the great success of the iPhone, Apple later released what might arguably be called the most popular and successful consumer device of the last couple of years: the iPad.

With the iPad, we can finally sit back again, like we would with a novel. The iPad is made for visually rich content. The user experience is more en-

compassing—and applications use the entire screen, blocking out other distractions. Photographs and videos look beautiful. Games are a new experience, but it is the text applications, like iBooks, that won me over. Perhaps this new device could finally begin to usher in an age of new media that those of us who still consider the novel integral to a literary zeitgeist could finally embrace—not as a replacement—but as an evolving, vibrant, and important literary form.

THE NOVEL 2.0?

In the late 1960s, Mailer saw a disturbing trend in America: with the many distractions that contemporary America presents, people are no longer reading literature. There was a revolution happening, but instead of being aligned with the great literary figures of America's oppositional past—Whitman, Emerson, Hemingway—it was instead one of television, popular music, and drugs (Bufithis 89–90). While Mailer opposed the war in Vietnam and the new American authoritarian machine that precipitated it, he, too, opposed the increasing effects of a disengaged and lazy culture.

Similarly, America seems to still be engaged in a like battle. Fueled by the digital revolution, the developing world in the Middle East attempts to throw off the shackles of oppression and authoritarianism, but America seems to be moving in the opposite direction. Mass media today makes its consumers even less patient with complex ideas and nuance than it did when Mailer was writing *Armies*. While digital technology can provide the tools for political change and revolution, it can also be used by the corporations and mass media to keep people from thinking or acting for themselves. Mailer saw this dangerous side of increasingly ubiquitous computer technology, charging computers with being the tools of the devil (Mailer and Lennon 18). It is difficult to challenge that assertion when viewing the increasingly polarized and myopic American media.

The battle between democracy and authoritarianism can also be seen in literature's waning novel. The novel, ironically, is no longer "new," but to many represents literature's patriarchal past. While the digital age in many ways encourages us to become engaged with the world as citizens of a democracy should be, the voices of those artists, dreamers, and rebels who wrote powerful novels seem also to be caught up in the digital tsunami overtaking world culture and politics. Instead of holing up in our bunker hoping that the tide will pass, perhaps the digital age will present the novel with

a new life—a medium that can both represent the individual talent and the voices of the people.

While attempts to represent the novel in a new way on the Web[12] have potential, they will ultimately remain just experiments if readers are forced to use a computer. The device must not get in the way of our engaging the text. The novel's transparency is likely what many opponents of the computer seem to be most concerned with. We already know how a novel works. The medium of the novel does not get in the way of the content of the novel. In fact, the medium seems to highlight the content by the very fact of its transparency. Novels on the Web are more about the technology than they are about the content. This situation bothers us literati.

While we should be concerned about technological transparency, perhaps it is integral for a literary experience. Several new applications for tablet devices show promise, not only for traditional publications—like Apple's iBooks, Sony's eReader, and the Kindle—but also for those incorporating user interaction for annotations and bookmarks.[13] Perhaps it is less the digital aspect of the Novel 2.0 than the lack of solid and predictable conventions that bothers us.

The digital evolution or metamorphosis of the novel seems to be inevitable. Our books made of atoms are not going anywhere, but that medium has been getting old for a while—even Mailer saw it in the 1970s. The new era of the digital emphasizes participation and action for those who use it. It seems the novel must evolve, both as a medium and through its content, if it is to speak for a changing world.

NOTES

1. This essay is a conglomeration of several blog entries written over the course of several months. As with any translation from hypertext to traditional text, some of the nuance is inevitably lost. I've made some small attempt to unify the various sections, but I wanted the "essay" to feel more like a series of thoughts that address related threads of concern. To see much of what follows in its original, raw form, go to <http://grlucas.net/>. I would also like to elicit comments and feedback on the ideas I attempt to explore within.
2. For a thorough and thoughtful analysis of the current state of US copyright laws and their effect on American youth in particular, see Lessig.
3. Raymond's study considers open source software, which he likens to an unruly bazaar of unsanctioned trading, vis-a-vis proprietary software, which is like an impenetrable cathedral that limits access to maintain an authoritarian control.

4. I borrowed this idea from Stuart Moulthrop's essay "From Work to Play: Molecular Culture in the Time of Deadly Games." He argues that an age of complex systems encourages a shift from interpretation to configuration, a move from thought to action. He sees this shift as having ramifications not only for daily interactions, but implicitly for aesthetic practices.
5. I borrow Nicholas Negroponte's phrase throughout; it is the chief concern of his insightful *Being Digital.*
6. I am reminded here of the cybernetic loop—a system where cause and effect mutually influence one another through feedback.
7. See Bowker's industry stats, available: <http://www.bowkerinfo.com/bowker/IndustryStats 2010.pdf>. Short URL: <http://bit.ly/kpaoEd>.
8. See Hitwise: <http://www.hitwise.com/us/press-center/press-releases/facebook-was-the-top-search-term-in-2010-for-sec/>. Short URL: <http://bit.ly/m3xmaZ>.
9. See the report by Facebook's own Mark Zukerberg: <https://www.facebook.com/blog.php?post=409753352130>. Short URL: <http://on.fb.me/kcorTZ>.
10. See Pear Analytics: <http://www.pearanalytics.com/blog/2009/twitter-study-reveals-interesting-results-40-percent-pointless-babble/>. Short URL: <http://bit.ly/lIR3yN>.
11. At least this quotation is ascribed to Sterling. See *High Talk*: <http://hightalk.net/2011/03/21/twitter-turns-five/>. Short URL: <http://bit.ly/j1THRr>.
12. For example, see *Power Moby-Dick* <http://www.powermobydick.com/>; *The Golden Notebook* Project <http://thegoldennotebook.org/>; and Apture <http://vimeo.com/15725310>.
13. For example, see GoodReader <http://www.goodreader.net/goodreader.html>; Inkling <http://www.inkling.com/>; and Al Gore's Our Choice by Push Pop Press <http://pushpop-press.com/>.

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