



International Journal of Innovative Technologies in Social Science

e-ISSN: 2544-9435

Scholarly Publisher
RS Global Sp. z O.O.
ISNI: 0000 0004 8495 2390

Dolna 17, Warsaw,
Poland 00-773
+48 226 0 227 03
editorial_office@rsglobal.pl

ARTICLE TITLE

TRANSFORMATION OF LITERARY FIELDS IN ALGERIA: FROM
PRINT TO DIGITAL

ARTICLE INFO

Ibtissam Tebani. (2024) Transformation of Literary Fields in Algeria: From Print to Digital. *International Journal of Innovative Technologies in Social Science*. 4(44). doi: 10.31435/ijitss.4(44).2024.3392

DOI

[https://doi.org/10.31435/ijitss.4\(44\).2024.3392](https://doi.org/10.31435/ijitss.4(44).2024.3392)

RECEIVED

15 September 2024

ACCEPTED

15 October 2024

PUBLISHED

30 December 2024

LICENSE



The article is licensed under a **Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License**.

© The author(s) 2024.

This article is published as open access under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0), allowing the author to retain copyright. The CC BY 4.0 License permits the content to be copied, adapted, displayed, distributed, republished, or reused for any purpose, including adaptation and commercial use, as long as proper attribution is provided.

TRANSFORMATION OF LITERARY FIELDS IN ALGERIA: FROM PRINT TO DIGITAL

Ibtissam Tebani

Mohamed Boudiaf University of M'sila

ABSTRACT

The transition from printed books to digital formats marks a significant transformation in the landscape of Algerian literature. A growing number of writers are using blogs, social media, and digital platforms to share their creations, providing greater freedom of expression to new and often marginalized voices. The digital age is also fostering increased linguistic diversity, with writings in Tamazight, colloquial Arabic, and French. Book fairs continue to exist, but now coexist with online events. This progression facilitates the dissemination of works, circumventing the limitations of conventional publishing. However, it also highlights issues such as the digital divide, the lack of adequate regulation, and insufficient copyright protection. The article under review sheds light on these transformations, examines Sarah Rivens's novel *Captive* from the perspective of digital technology and the psychological genre, and raises questions regarding the recognition of digital technology in the Algerian literary field.

KEYWORDS

Digital Literariness, New Voices, Linguistic Diversity, Transformation of Literary Fields, Dark Romance

CITATION

Ibtissam Tebani. (2024) Transformation of Literary Fields in Algeria: From Print to Digital. *International Journal of Innovative Technologies in Social Science*. 4(44). doi: 10.31435/ijitss.4(44).2024.3392

COPYRIGHT

© The author(s) 2024. This article is published as open access under the **Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0)**, allowing the author to retain copyright. The CC BY 4.0 License permits the content to be copied, adapted, displayed, distributed, republished, or reused for any purpose, including adaptation and commercial use, as long as proper attribution is provided.

Introduction.

For a long time, Algerian literature was dominated by traditional publishing channels—local publishing houses, bookstores, and book fairs. It was primarily produced and distributed in print, within an often elitist and centralized context, limited by economic, political, and linguistic constraints. However, since the early 2010s, a significant transformation has emerged: thanks to the expansion of the Internet, social media, and writing platforms such as Wattpad, a new literary sphere has come into being. This sphere challenges established norms and has sparked debates and questions within the literary community. As a result, its integration into the established literary canon has "become one of the thorny issues" (Gilles, 2017, p. 54)

This digital transition has given rise to a generation of self-taught and connected authors who bypass traditional publishing routes to publish independently, directly, and often under the guise of anonymity. Their writings are redefining the boundaries of literary production in Algeria, making it more accessible and interactive, but also more vulnerable. This phenomenon is strongly felt through the path of Sarah Rivens, a French-language Algerian writer who emerged on Wattpad and is now a bookstore best-seller. She affirms the existence of an innovative Algerian literary scene: young, feminine, and transnational. Thus, a crucial question arises: how does the shift from print to digital fundamentally alter the literary landscape in Algeria, both in terms of its practices and its stakes?

To address this question, we will begin by examining the formation of the traditional literary space in Algeria, before reviewing the transformations brought about by digital technology through the example of Sarah Rivens. Next, we will analyze her work *Captive* as a representation of this emerging hybrid form of writing. Finally, we will explore the challenges and constraints posed by this digital literature, caught between the promise of democratization and the instability of its recognition.

1. Transformation of Literary Spaces in Algeria: From Print to Digital

1.1. The Traditional Literary Space in Algeria: For a long time, the Algerian literary landscape was structured around tangible media: printed books, literary periodicals, bookstores, and book fairs. This model, inherited from the colonial era and reinforced after independence, was based on a limited number of publishers (such as Casbah, ENAG, Barzakh, etc.) located in major cities like Algiers and Oran. Access to publication remained restricted, often depending on power networks or institutional recognition.

The distribution of books was also limited: the number of bookstores was small, public libraries were often poorly stocked, and books—particularly those in French or imported—were considered expensive. One must also take into account the complexity of Algeria's linguistic landscape: authors write in Arabic, Tamazight, or French, in an environment where each language carries a distinct political and symbolic history.

1.2. The Rise of Digital Technology: New Media, New Habits: The development of the Internet, blogs, forums, and later social media gradually transformed the literary landscape. Digital literature refers to “any narrative or poetic form that uses the computer as a medium and implements one or more properties specific to that medium” (Philippe, February 10, 2022)

Platforms such as Wattpad offer everyone the opportunity to write and publish without having to comply with the selection criteria of traditional publishing. Writing becomes more natural, generally more candid, and is aimed at engaged reader communities.

Young people in particular are embracing these new tools to publish stories, leave comments, vote, write fan fiction, or read serialized novels. Reading is being transformed: it becomes mobile, fragmented, and interactive. Moreover, this type of literature requires strong digital skills from the author, who must be “a coder before being a writer” (Thierry)

Arnaud Maïsetti emphasizes the importance of coding in the craft of digital literature, stating: *“Code had become our alphabet. We were drawing. The page of our websites was shaped by our own hands, like the quill we once sharpened to match the unique and shifting pace of our wrists. Hours spent on a few lines of code to tweak a single line spacing—who would even notice? We shared lines of code like secrets, like vaguely magical formulas.”* (Arnaud, 2018)

Readers are also expected to possess certain digital skills in order to fully appreciate digital works. In Algeria, despite disparities in internet access, these digital spaces have been widely embraced by a youth eager to express themselves.

1.3. Digital Literature in Algeria: Although still relatively new in Algeria, digital literature is gradually developing thanks to increased internet access and the expansion of social media. Many Algerian writers are now exploring the opportunities that digital platforms offer to publish, disseminate, and even create new forms of literature. These initiatives reflect a desire to adapt to new practices while providing a platform for a generation often excluded from traditional publishing channels.

A notable example is Kamel Bencheikh, an author and poet who frequently uses digital platforms to share his poems and reflections. The use of blogs and social media platforms like Facebook gives him the opportunity to reach a broader audience, particularly within the diaspora. Similarly, Algerian author Amel Bouchareb publishes some of her short stories online, sharing them on specialized platforms or forums dedicated to literature.

Although it is an *amateur* site, *Algeria-Writings* brings together works by young authors who publish their writings in serialized form online, often accompanied by images or videos. This type of platform offers a space for free and interactive expression, especially for women and young writers.

Algerian digital literature also finds expression through self-published e-books on platforms such as Wattpad or Amazon Kindle. Emerging writers like Reda Amrani share science fiction stories or thrillers influenced by modern *Algerian realities, written in a clear and accessible style that appeals to a young, digitally savvy audience.*

Ultimately, some literary projects combine writing with multimedia creation. For example, digital writing workshops at universities in Algiers or Tizi Ouzou offer students the opportunity to create interactive stories by incorporating sound, images, or hyperlinks, thereby generating new forms of storytelling.

In conclusion, although digital literature in Algeria is still in its infancy and generally remains secondary compared to printed literature, it reflects genuine dynamism, supported by an inventive and tech-savvy youth.

2. Sarah Rivens: An Emblematic Literary Journey

2.1. An Author Born on Wattpad: Sarah Rivens is an Algerian writer who began her publishing career anonymously on Wattpad. Her works, especially the *Dark Knights* series and *Captive*, have enjoyed tremendous success, with several million reads. She is classified within the dark romance genre, blending passion, violence, and psychological tension.

Her writing in *French*, her knowledge of genre conventions, and her close connection with her digital audience give her a large and loyal following, mainly composed of teenagers and young women.

2.2. From Screen to Bookshelf: Recognition in the Publishing World: This digital success attracted the interest of the publisher Hachette Romans, which offered a printed edition. Her novels, upon publication, achieved commercial success and have been translated and distributed internationally.

This unusual trajectory marks a turning point: the author was not selected by a traditional literary committee but by the public. It demonstrates that digital platforms are capable of forging new paths to literary recognition.

2.3. A Representative Figure of a Connected Generation: Sarah Rivens represents Algerian youth who, while aligned with global norms, remain deeply rooted in a local context. She encourages other young authors to share their works online and to believe in their value even without official recognition. She thus becomes an example of female empowerment and creativity.

3. Literary Analysis of *Captive*: At the Crossroads of Web Codes and Psychological Novel

3.1. A Narrative Rooted in Digital Media: The book *Captive* draws on the conventions of digital literature: short chapters, first-person narration, lively exchanges, and cliffhanger endings. This format, designed for reading online in segments, facilitates the reader's immediate immersion.

Unlike conventional fiction, which is typically characterized by a sequential narrative progression from introduction to conclusion, hyperfiction offers an interactive and non-linear form of storytelling that allows readers to experience a more personalized and immersive literary journey. It employs hyperlinks to connect different elements of the text, enabling readers to explore the story in a non-linear way and benefit from alternative modes of reading.

As Anne-Cécile Brandenburger, author of the hyperfiction *Apparitions inquiétantes*, emphasizes: "*The hyperlink can make literature and fiction more intuitive, better aligned with the processes of daydreaming, with the imagination that lets us wander from one idea to another or from one word to an image [...] it certainly corresponds to our behavior as channel surfers.*" (jean, September 2002)

Thus, hypertext allows readers to navigate the text at will, choose their own path, and consequently create a unique reading experience. It grants them greater freedom and interaction by actively involving them in constructing their understanding of the story.

The style is direct, emotionally charged, and conversational. It targets a young audience familiar with references from TV series and social media.

3.2. A Work with a Psychological Dimension: In addition to its popular elements, *Captive* offers a deep immersion into the mind of its heroine, Ella, who faces isolation, trauma, and then a process of rebuilding. Ella's emotional evolution and her relationship with her kidnappers raise important questions: emotional dependence, resilience, and the memory of violence.

3.3. A Work at the Intersection of Worlds: *Captive* portrays literary hybridity: oscillating between a digital series and a psychological novel, between popular culture and identity issues. This demonstrates that literature emerging from the web can also address sensitive themes with a certain narrative subtlety.

3.4. *Captive* by Sarah Rivens: What Exactly Does This Book Represent?: It is one of the most popular works in the field of dark romance, a relatively new genre that represents a subcategory of so-called "sentimental" or "romance" literature, to which we were, for example, accustomed through collections from publishers like Harlequin. Romance breaks down into several subgenres: romantic fantasy (love stories involving fairies and dragons), historical romances (romantic narratives set in the medieval era or the English Regency), among others. Dark romance is characterized by love stories where a dark and violent atmosphere is added to a romantic plot, which remains the main thread of the story.

However, it is a highly controversial genre in recent years, which apparently propagates rape culture and sketches the model of toxic relationships. It was therefore preferable for me to borrow the book (the first volume; I did not go further) from one of my students to form a personal opinion about its content, so I could better adjust my reactions to this literary trend among the students who visit the library resource center. The

aim is to avoid error or uncertainty, which implies that I had read the book before commenting to those who have already read it.

The story follows the journey of Ella, a 22-year-old woman who was forced into prostitution by a pimp who sold her to his aunt (her parents having both died) due to financial problems. She finds herself in the position of a "captive," a form of slavery that is not necessarily sexual (though it was in her case) and is under the possession of her master. She is therefore required to obey, which in no way implies that she must feel respect or any other sentiment towards her master. This evokes the "furniture girls" from the futuristic film *Soylent Green* (1973), who come with the rental apartment and whose aesthetic and "status" role is crucial: in Sarah Rivens' world, it seems that slaves are essential to guarantee social status for influential men, able to support them and provide them with (more or less) engaging activity. Ella is, in fact, transferred to another owner: Asher Scott, the 25-year-old head of a criminal syndicate dealing in arms and drugs, handsome, covered in tattoos, and possessing an extremely angry and authoritarian personality.

It is Asher's family, particularly his uncle, who gives him Ella: Asher Scott does not want a captive, given that he had a tumultuous relationship with a previous captive with whom he shared a romance, but who ultimately betrayed him, as did the rest of his group. Asher therefore begins by imprisoning Ella in a cellar for several days, making her suffer from thirst, then burning her hand with a hot plate (third chapter), all the while never stopping insulting, mistreating, and humiliating her.

However, the story depicts how Ella and Asher gradually grow closer over the course of the narrative. The plot mainly focuses on the tense exchanges between the two but also includes certain "missions," action scenes, espionage, or receptions adorned with grand dresses and diamond jewelry, inspired by the slightly ostentatious fantasies of *The Godfather* or the *James Bond* saga. At the end of the first volume, Ella and Asher find themselves separated due to circumstances (Asher deliberately chooses to put distance between himself and Ella to prevent her from becoming a target for his half-brother, who is the sworn enemy of his clan). Yet, they share moments of intimacy that definitively unite them, without their love being expressed through sexual relations. Indeed, Asher fears putting his beloved in danger by becoming too attached, and it is assumed that Ella is still haunted by the trauma of her past assaults.

Critics were quick to point out the ethical flaws of this type of story: rape culture, sexism, Stockholm syndrome. Does the novel promote rape culture? Not really, since Ella has been raped before, and these experiences are always described as traumatic. As for Asher, considered the "positive" character in the book (he is, at any rate, an object of desire and thus valorized by the narrative), he never forces her into sexual relations. In fact, one of the book's strengths is its clear depiction of the traumatic elements of rape: throughout the story, Ella frequently faces the aftereffects of her previous traumas, experiencing paralyzing anxiety attacks whenever an incident or a third party evokes the abuses she suffered. Thus, from a certain point of view, one could argue that the novel opposes rape culture. However, it is more complex than that, and we will revisit this topic later.

Furthermore, critics have highlighted the "Stockholm syndrome" aspect of the story, a psychological phenomenon where the victim eventually identifies with their captor, and conversely, the aggressor develops a form of kindness toward the victim. This is clearly the case in this novel, where Ella develops a passion for a man who: 1/ is her lord and master, able to restrict her freedom at will, and interacts with her in the same way a hostage-taker would with their captive; 2/ constantly subjects her to humiliation, indifference, and objectification (he initially refuses to call her by her name, preferring to call her "captive"), and at least at the beginning, mistreats her.

How does she begin to fall in love with him? In a somewhat unlikely scene, Ella finds herself threatened with sexual assault by a third party, triggering anxiety attacks. Following this, Asher comforts her by holding her and spending the night by her side (with the utmost respect and decency). Thus, Asher is able to soothe her, not only because he does not seek a sexual relationship with her, but also because he represents a protective support that could help her emancipation, or at least shield her from her own worries related to her traumatic past.

How can one believe that Asher could be a source of comfort for Ella when he initially terrorized and violently abused her relentlessly? Inexplicably, Asher does not join the list of Ella's past tormentors. A definition of Stockholm syndrome is that victims develop empathy for their captors when they manage to rationalize and explain their actions. Here, however, none of that applies: Ella only understands the reasons behind Asher's horrible behavior at the very end of the story, even though her feelings for her abuser had already begun to improve long before. The lack of psychological consistency in the narrative is therefore obvious — one wouldn't expect more from a "romance" novel, which never has the subtlety of a psychological novel, but that doesn't prevent us from pointing it out.

Let's now talk about sexism. The passion between Ella and Asher emerges from brutality, insults, humiliation, and moreover from a master/slave relationship: in short, from male supremacy over the female. Obviously, in the universe created by Sarah Rivens, women of value are not captured, while influential men are: it remains an openly unbalanced patriarchy. The valorized male figures also embody the most extreme stereotypes of brutal masculinity: Asher exercises tyrannical control over his subordinates, is covered in tattoos, has an imposing physique, constantly smokes, and never hesitates to eliminate people despite being only 25 years old. In short, he is a coarse and rough individual whom Ella repeatedly calls a "psychopath" throughout the novel. Inexplicably, he controls his anger poorly yet perfectly suppresses his sexual desires: he continues to spread terror around him with sudden rage fits, while managing to contain his attraction to Ella. Could this paradox serve as an indicator of the character's complexity rather than a psychological inconsistency? In any case, this novel does not propagate sexist clichés: it tells a romance between a submissive woman, incapable of acting except by being alluring and maintained, and a dynamic, violent, angry, inflexible, and domineering man whose profession is risky and involves eliminating people and giving orders.

In this narrative, two crucial aspects can be noted. The first is the marked immaturity of the characters: Ella is often irritating, swinging between great maturity and an inconceivable childishness for no obvious reason. Asher regularly bursts out laughing like a child, which is completely out of sync with his character. This decidedly childish tone, totally unlikely given the characters (a former prostitute, a mafia boss), is nevertheless perfectly suited to appeal to a potential audience: young teenagers.

The second observation, which complements the first, is that the constant teasing and biting remarks are closely linked to a dominant form of socialization in middle school and the early years of high school: a culture of conflict that aims to throw as many jokes as possible at one's interlocutor, with the goal of asserting superiority in the social arena (the classroom, the school, peer groups, digital social media...).

In a school context where physical aggression is prohibited, verbal aggression remains. Rap is heavily influenced by a culture of conflict, amplified by social media where many short videos on Instagram, YouTube, or TikTok aim to mock—sometimes gently, sometimes not—certain individuals or social groups (overweight people, Arabs, women, etc.), whether literally or not. Among some middle school students, it seems the only way to interact with peers is through exchanges of punchlines: who will come up with the best comeback? Middle school students who are too concerned about their peers' judgment or who want to establish a direct and natural relationship with young people of their generation often suffer the consequences.

Similarly, the idea that dark romance offers young girls a model of romantic storytelling based—even if in a fantasized way—on conflict, antagonism, and violence can be seen as at least problematic. However, this is one of the factors explaining the book's success among young middle school girls, even though it is intended for a young adult audience. It remains unclear what the appropriate age for the reader is. BMR, the publisher, does not set any age limit; however, the book is generally recommended by booksellers and librarians for readers over 15 years old, thus targeting high school students. It is also noted that dark romance is not classified as "youth literature," which allows it to escape censorship by the Ministry of the Interior.

This causes some confusion among readers: "First of all, it is a work that, although positioned among books for adults, has no place there: it is a work intended for adolescents." Written by an author lacking maturity, presumably freshly out of adolescence. A novel aimed at young adults who enjoy serial fantasy literature ends up, due to the clear immaturity of its characters, in the hands of middle school girls to whom it did not seem initially intended: the target audience and the actual readership do not appear to coincide, at least partially. This raises pedagogical concerns, summarized by a high school teacher who also recounts the story of a bookseller friend. It should be noted that this book is very popular among many high school students. What is surprising is to see the fantasy of a woman probably poorly educated in psychology, trauma studies, and sexuality (and all the pleasures she might imagine). It idealizes and romanticizes rape and attachment syndrome, making these young readers believe that this is normal...

Moreover, if young people, especially girls or teenage girls, consume this type of literature, it can sometimes also reflect a certain discomfort—or maybe not at all. In this situation, the most sensible approach would be to start a discussion, listen, pay attention to what the reader thinks about this novel, and then try to persuade them that it is not appropriate for them to read it and that it is not suitable for their age... Criticizing a reading for ethical reasons is the most effective way to end the conversation and to exaggerate the psychological and social impact of fiction. It is essential to consider this impact, which is very real, without endorsing this type of sexist literature.

4. Challenges and Constraints of This New Digital Literature

4.1. The Challenges: Digital literature represents a democratization of the literary voice: it allows those who were previously invisible to be seen, simplifies access to writing, and generates new reading audiences. It also offers an unprecedented direct connection between the writer and the reader in the history of literature.

4.2. The Limitations: However, this literature also presents challenges: the lack of editorial supervision often compromises the quality of the works. It still struggles to gain official recognition: literary critics and universities tend to neglect or isolate it. Ultimately, the economic model remains unclear: authors are poorly compensated, while platforms benefit from content at no cost.

Digital literature continues to provoke controversy in the literary field by sparking discussions about the very definition of literature. This is due to the emergence of a new form of literariness whose major characteristics include the incorporation of visual, sound, and interactive elements, as well as the use of features such as hyperlinks, animations, visual effects, simulations, databases, and algorithms. It thus tends to overvalue digital objects that stand out for their remarkable originality and notable technical prowess but which can sometimes be relatively limited in terms of narrative or even style. This contemporary art, whose main objective is to focus attention on the technical dimension and the work's device, faces several specific challenges related to its nature and context. Among these, the main ones are: Works designed for particular platforms or formats must be regularly updated to remain accessible.

Unlike classical works that can be physically preserved in libraries, the digital files in which these creations are stored risk becoming incompatible with future technologies. They require regular backup and conversion into more durable formats.

- Faced with the abundance of content on the web, the question of visibility is more crucial than ever: it is possible that digital literature gets lost in the media noise and struggles to attract attention. Digital distribution makes the reproduction, dissemination, and modification of artistic works easier, thus raising questions about the respect of intellectual property and the protection of artists.

- The literary aspect and the artistic value of digital works amplify resistance within the literary community. There are those who firmly oppose the recognition of digital works and argue that the intensive use of media and interactivity compromises the very essence of literature. According to them, digital creations are nothing more than entertainment that can never compete with true literary works. Thierry Crouzet, in this passage, particularly emphasizes this observation; he addresses researchers to give them a rather strict warning after a long career in the field of digital creation: "Talking about authors in the digital age, digital authors, or literature traps us, suffocates us, tears us away from the realm of literature." (Thierry & Servane, 2020, pp. 5-27)

He persists with this surprising decision: "I printed the entirety of my blog a few months ago to prove to myself that it was a work like any other, to place it next to my books, to place it next to other people's books, to materially inscribe it into the history of literature." (Thierry & Servane, 2020, pp. 5-27)

In light of what has been said, we can argue that, in their current form, digital works cannot be classified as literature. However, they remain an act of digital writing with a digital, aesthetic, and conceptual orientation.

4.3. Future Challenges : The major challenge is to establish a balance between accessibility and rigor, between freedom of expression and cultural recognition. This also requires promoting education in digital reading and creating connections between online literature and traditional publishing.

Conclusions

Through the analysis of transformations in the literary world in Algeria, we have highlighted a significant turning point: the gradual transition from classical printed literature to an open and interactive digital literature. This shift, far more than a simple change of medium, radically alters the methods of creation, distribution, and appreciation of literary works.

The emergence of writers such as Sarah Rivens, who was spotlighted by Wattpad before gaining recognition in the traditional publishing world, represents this new momentum. In her book *Captive*, the author portrays a hybrid literature, combining popular web norms with psychological depth. This literature, by highlighting a connected youth, reflects a profound sociocultural transformation.

REFERENCES

1. Arnaud, M. (2018). *Digital Writings | This is not a conclusion*. Retrieved February 22, from <https://www.arnaudmaisetti.net/spip/ecritures-numeriques-webnotes/article/ecritures-numeriques-cest-n-est-pas-unbilan>
2. Gilles, B. (2017). *For a Digital Poetics: Literature and the Internet*. Hermann.
3. jean, C. (September 2002, 23 May 2022). *On Some Fantasies of Combinatorial Literature* Practices and Communities, Rennes. http://vadeker.net/essais/Fantasmes_de_la%20litterature_combinatoire.html
4. Philippe, B. (February 10, 2022). *WHAT IS DIGITAL LITERATURE?* Retrieved December from www.olats.org
5. Thierry, C. *If you're not a coder, you're not a writer*. tcrouzet.com
6. Thierry, C., & Servane, M. (2020). Digital literature does not exist. Literariness through the prism of contemporary media imagination," in *Communication & langages*. (205), 5-27. <https://www.cairn.info/revue-communication-et-langages-2020-3-page-5.htm>