Social Media and Literary Writing Written in English: Instagram as a Model

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Abstract

This study explores the growing relation between societal media and English literature and the influence of the former on the latter. The study focuses on Instagram as a new literary environment. It also explores how one platform results in the authors' need to adapt their literary wording and content to suit this one platform. Moreover, the study exhibits several examples of literary outcome taken from Instagram and discusses them while showing their differences from traditional literary forms, if such differences exist.

The study is divided into a discussion and a conclusion. The first part of the discussion presents a brief background about the societal media. A brief introduction about literature written in English follows then comes the way whereby societal media and literature are related. The closing part of the introduction presents a definition of Instagram.

The following part presents the influence of Instagram on literature with several related literary examples. In addition, a literary discussion of the provided examples is added.

The study ends with a conclusion which sums up the findings of this study and leaves the door open for further studies.

Literature and Instagram

In order to fully comprehend the influence of Societal Media on Literature, one first needs to understand a brief history of the process writing, and a brief history of both English literature and media on the one hand, and the environment on the other, which are chosen for this discussion. One also needs to learn whether media have any influence upon literature or not.

Writing refers to all forms of registering information on paper including manuscripts, inscription and printing. It first began in the ancient world around the fourth millennium B.C. namely Mesopotamia four millenniums BC in a form called pictography, and then the Pre-Colombian Mesoamericans introduced phonetic elements before the sixteenth century A.D. Now it is spread worldwide. Meanwhile, writing passed through three main forms of registering information, of which the first was a form of a manuscript, which referred to handwritten information that appeared some 1000 years ago. It was followed by the inscription that referred to the process of applying letter figures on paper. Its final form was printing and mass printing that appeared, flourished and dominated the art of writing after the industrial revolution.[1] It is worth noting that writing paved the way for the spread and preserving of both literature and media.

English literature includes any literary work whether verse or prose composed in the English Language. The earliest forms of English literature are attributed to the Anglo-Saxons back in the fifth century. Its later forms include the literature of The Middle English Period, The Renaissance, The Restoration, The Eighteenth Century, The Romantic Period, The Victorian Period, Twentieth-Century Period and The Modern and Contemporary periods.[2]

Media includes all stages of processing information which passes from discovering the information to delivering it to the targeted audience.

Media was first introduced in the first century BC in Rome, and it was introduced in England in the mid of the fifteenth century. It flourished in England during the next two centuries. Media hit a crossroad with English literature with such notable literary figures like Daniel Defoe (1660s – 1731) and Jonathan Swift (1667 – 1745). It flourished during the nineteenth century when it gained a widespread among the public reading. This flourishing is due to the mass printing and inexpensive copies, well welcomed all over the world.[3]

The crossroads of literature and media are not only about those two figures, Defoe and Swift, but it also can be said that literary figures employed media to spread literature in all its forms. This new combination of media and literature has its indisputable role and unquestionable importance in serving and influencing literature.[4] Literary presentation is no more presented only by pen and tongue, for it has invaded newspapers, magazines and television. Literary works, especially classics become rich content of TV shows, programs, documentaries, series and films.

Progress is not yet to stop, especially with the cyber revolution and the invention of the internet. Internet witnesses tremendous accessibility and possibility to the way literature is treated due to the low expenses, the easy and fast options of both publishing and accessing data anywhere. Internet offers a wide range of services that are related to all kinds of writing. These services include archiving, sorting, publishing, sharing, reviewing, and commenting on and criticizing literary outcomes.[5]

The services offered by the internet paved the way for the creation of a cyber space for authors and audience that allowed both parts to be in

direct contact with each other, to share and receive literary outcome immediately, and to be involved in open discussions about the advantages and drawbacks of a literary outcome. The accommodations offered by the internet led to the creation of a new literary genre called "blog" that soon led to the creation of a website specialized for authors and writers carrying the same name. The word "blog," according to Webster Dictionary, is a shortened form of weblog that first came into use in 1999 and it means "a Web site that contains an online personal journal with reflections, comments, and often hyperlinks provided by the writer."[6]

The fast pace of developing technology led to the creation of a new form of media that is called New Media. It is a form of media depending on the binary technology instead of the analogic environment.[7]

It seems that Societal Media is a subdivision of New Media, which is a group of websites and applications of both internet and mobile phones that allows its users to share, exchange, create and join online communities. Societal

Media flourished after the invention of smartphones, especially during the late 2000s. Now, it includes several content-specialized subdivisions.[8] The societal environment related to this study falls under the subdivision Media-Sharing, and it is called Instagram. Instagram is a smartphone application for both IOS and Android operating systems. It allows its users to share pictures and then receive comments, discussions and hearts that are similar to the like expression, for that pictures.[9]

Nowadays, the societal environment is being employed by authors all over the world to share their literary outcome, which includes short verses, discussions, diaries, letters and quotations.

Before giving and discussing literary samples shared in Instagram, it is worthy to discussing the concept of Instagram, its features and its influence on literature.
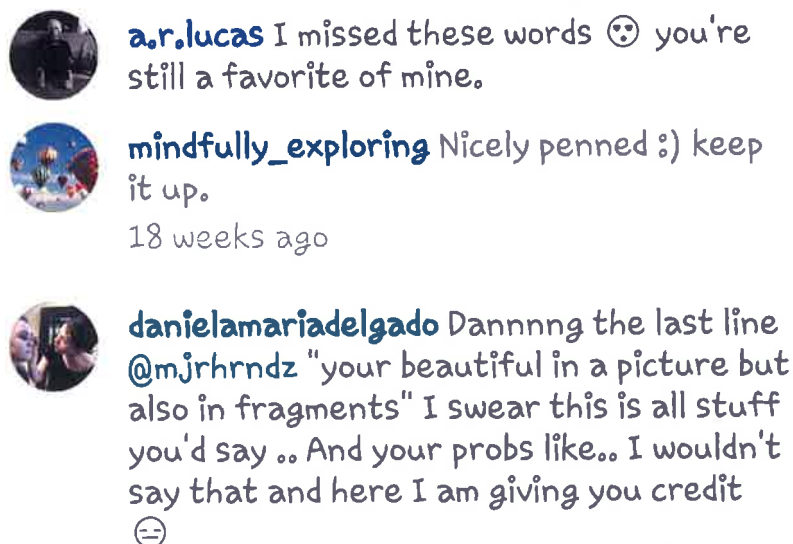
Instagram is a photo-sharing application. Many authors employ the application with the aid of other supplementary applications to create a picture comment. These picture comments may contain emoji expressing a certain attitude or mood. Emoji, according to Webster's Dictionary are:
any of various small images, symbols, or icons used in text fields in electronic communication (as in text messages, e-mail, and social media) to express the emotional attitude of the writer, convey information succinctly, communicate a message playfully without using words, etc.[10]

The three elements together, i.e. words, pictures and emoji, in addition to the comment below an image, can be combined together to create a brief yet

rich literary context. The literary outcome shares several literary aspects with the traditional forms of literature. Several literary writings include numerous figures of speech such as simile, personification and even metaphor. Moreover, like in traditional literature, authors tend to publish or, according to societal media terminology, "to post" their literary outcome either under their real names, or anonymously, or by using a pseudonym.

The importance of this platform lies in its attraction of millions of users, for a posted literary outcome may attract huge number of audience; Free comments result in open literary discussions that may include literary criticism which is defined by *Encyclopedia Britannica* as being "any argumentation about literature."[11]

Figure no. 1

a.r.lucas I missed these words 😳 you're still a favorite of mine.

mindfully_exploring Nicely penned :) keep it up.
18 weeks ago

danielamariadelgado Dannnng the last line @mjrhrndz "your beautiful in a picture but also in fragments" I swear this is all stuff you'd say .. And your probs like.. I wouldn't say that and here I am giving you credit 😒
18 weeks ago
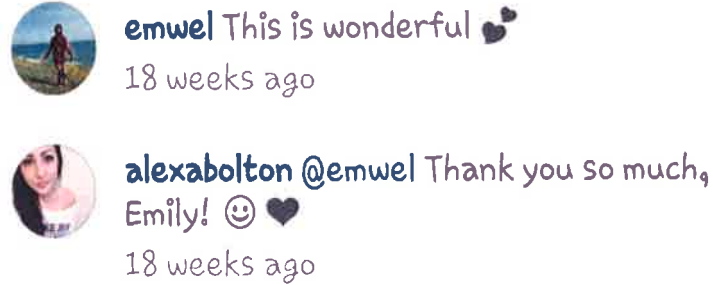
All of these three comments are taken from those who read Alexa Bolton's poems. Here, they show their admiration of her works. The

following example shows how this platform makes it very easy for the author to interact with his fans.

Figure no. 2:

emwel This is wonderful 🐾
18 weeks ago

alexabolton @emwel Thank you so much, Emily! ☺ 💜
18 weeks ago

The importance is not limited to commenting, for it goes far beyond that to include the wide quick-paced spread of literary works, besides the influence of Instagram on literary content and form about which the question "how" might be arisen, and the answer for this question lies in the regulations of this platform. Jenn Herman states in her article "What Are Your Limits on Instagram?" mentions "the limit for captions on the photo and subsequent comments caps at 2200 characters," "comments … take around 240 characters," and that one "cannot post more than 30 hashtags per post."[14] Moreover, the picture size determines the possible visual words posted within one picture, which oblige authors to adapt their wording and content to fit the size limit or to post following the serialization style, which is in turn a revival of the old form of serialized publication.

Figures no. 3, 4 and 5

```
                                          you? What apologies will fill your bellies,
                                          what condolences can warm your hands?



                                              -Tyler Knott Gregson-
```

♥ **1,866 likes**

tylerknott Typewriter Series #1357 by Tyler Knott

```
                      live intertwined, sometimes
                      we learn of wings
                      only after we've flown.



                          -Tyler Knott Gregson-
```

♥ **3,219 likes**

tylerknott Typewriter Series #1356 by Tyler Knott

```
                      lines? Can I discover how
                      to make them hold the weight
                      of this heart?



                          -Tyler Knott Gregson-
```
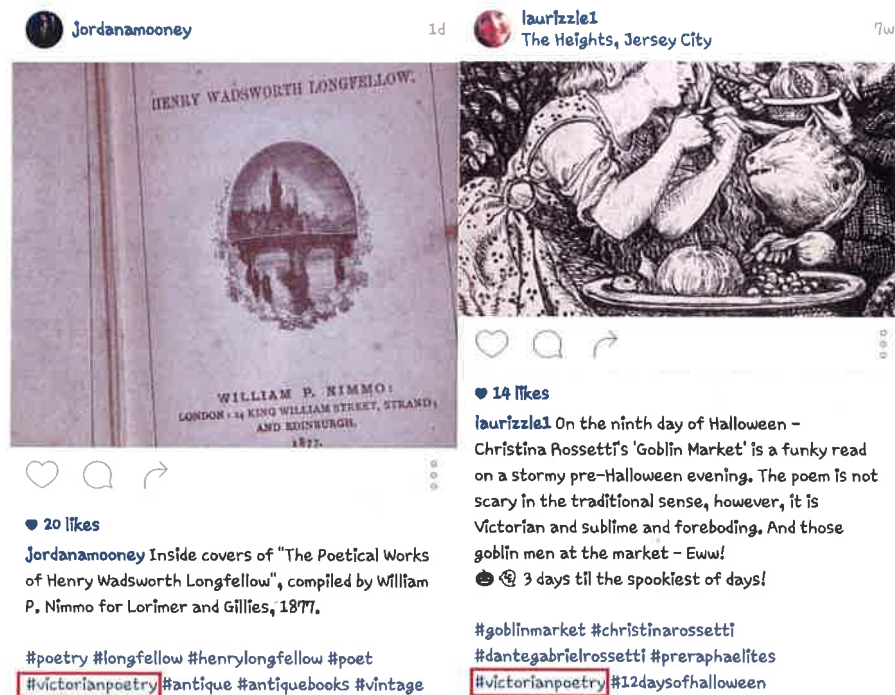
♥ **2,006 likes**

tylerknott Typewriter Series #1355 by Tyler Knott

The three highlighted numbers in the previous three examples mentioned above refer to each poem's number among the other poems of "Typewriter Series" by Tyler Knott.

It is worth noting that the Instagram platform allows its users to sort and categorize their literary outcome "posts" by its subject or literary school, and several other categories by means of hashtag "#." The process is as simple as adding the symbol "#" followed by a keyword, or keywords. To make it even simpler for the reader of this study, here is an example that features the keywords "Victorian," "poetry," the hashtag will be #Victorianpoetry.

Figure no. 6:

Jordanamooney   1d

20 likes

Jordanamooney Inside covers of "The Poetical Works of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow", compiled by William P. Nimmo for Lorimer and Gillies, 1877.

#poetry #longfellow #henrylongfellow #poet #victorianpoetry #antique #antiquebooks #vintage

laurizzle1   7w
The Heights, Jersey City

14 likes

laurizzle1 On the ninth day of Halloween – Christina Rossetti's 'Goblin Market' is a funky read on a stormy pre-Halloween evening. The poem is not scary in the traditional sense, however, it is Victorian and sublime and foreboding. And those goblin men at the market – Eww! 🍂🎃 3 days til the spookiest of days!

#goblinmarket #christinarossetti #dantegabrielrossetti #preraphaelites #victorianpoetry #12daysofhalloween

The example mentioned above presents two posts by two different users on Instagram: "jordanamooney," and "laurizzle1" with the hashtag #victorianpoetry. It categorizes the two posts and many other posts in the same category as shown in the following highlighted example:

Figure no. 7:
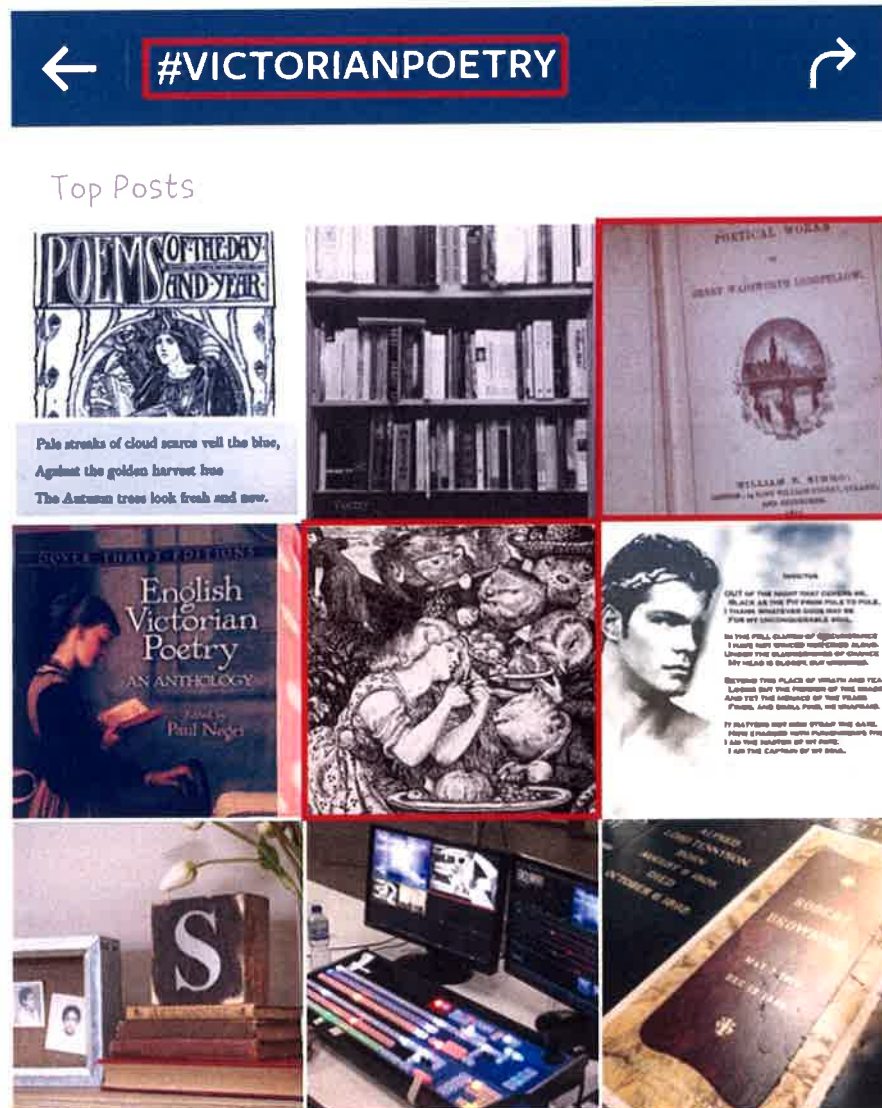
The following part of the study presents several examples of literary works posted on this platform and discusses them with a view to illuminating the points of influence of this platform on the literary style. The works selected are written in English by native speakers and by users of English as a foreign language.

Figure no. 8:

sml1603   5w

HIS LOVE
BELONGED TO HIS ART

HER LOVE
BELONGED TO HIM

A BEAUTIFUL TRAGEDY
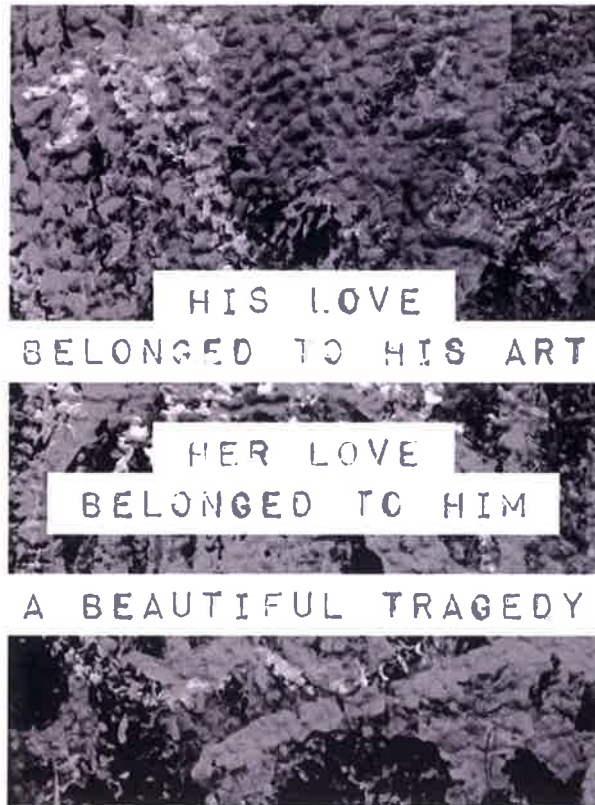
The above-mentioned example is limited to three sentences, five lines, which express the idea of one-side love. It is described here as a "BEAUTIFUL TRAGEDY" and this phrase represents an example of oxymoron when it relates the adjective "BEAUTIFUL" to the noun "TRAGEDY." It exposes a speaker and two characters, a lover and her tragic hero. Now that he does not love the girl shows that her life is doomed to be a tragedy; it is a beautiful tragedy because he is the reason behind this tragedy it.

In the following poem, the lines presented by the user "fleshandsoul" themselves indicate criticism indicating how people change and separate by the passage of time. The lines begin by stating an inevitable fact that it does not matter if a man grows old. It, then, presents two criticisms; the first one shows that humans usually are separated from one another for one reason or another such as their growing consciousness. This is supported by the second part of the poem which states the change occurring to one's consciousness about him/her self. The second states no particular reason for separation, which gives the poem a sense of universality. People usually get involved in their life problems to the extent that when they have a chance to take their breath they realize two things; first that there is no one around, whereas the second is that they are no more the same people they used to be.

Figure no. 9:

fleshandsoul   17w

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We grow old
and we grow apart.
From the people
  that were used to us,
and the people that
we used to be.
```

-F&S

The poet underwrites this literary outcome by supporting the idea in the first part of his comment, and then follows that by expressing that he was "fine" at the moment of letting someone go which might stand as the answer for this wondering.

fleshandsoul At times I wonder how and why I let go of people who I once held close but then I remember I was fine, in even letting go of myself.

Thus, the two examples mentioned above show that the choice of the black and grey-shaded background in the first and the blank one in the second support their subject matter with special meanings of dullness and paleness indicated by the colors black, white and grey on the one hand, and the meaning of change and old age, on the other.

Jessica Katoff, in the example in figure no. 11, employs two techniques: the serialization and the blackout techniques. The poet employs the second to cover the unnecessary words and keep the words needed. The outcome is the sentence "you have to imagine the hurt could heal" which conveys two meanings: an implied that "the hurt" an offence can not be healed due to what is mentioned in the statement "You have to imagine" which is far from reality. The "you" could only imagine, but the "I" could not heal; while the second meaning implies an advice that calls people to be optimistic and imagine that everything will be OK. The idea of never to give up is originally old, but it is still a daily need in our communities, especially with more chances of disappointments because of the harsh life. What is worth mentioning about the effect of this platform on literature is that the blackout technique has been spreading out steadily in this platform up to the time of writing this paper. The hashtag #blackoutpoetry has more than 26,000 items. This technique has a fast-paced growth on Instagram if compared to real world.
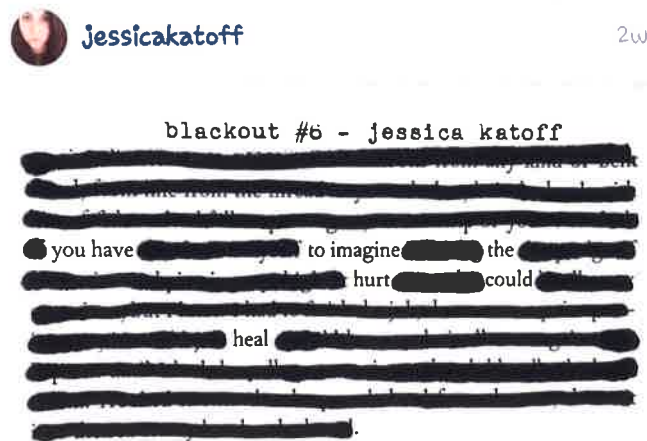
Figure no. 11:

Figure no. 12 exhibits the influence of this platform on literature when the user employs three elements: a sentece, a drawing, and an
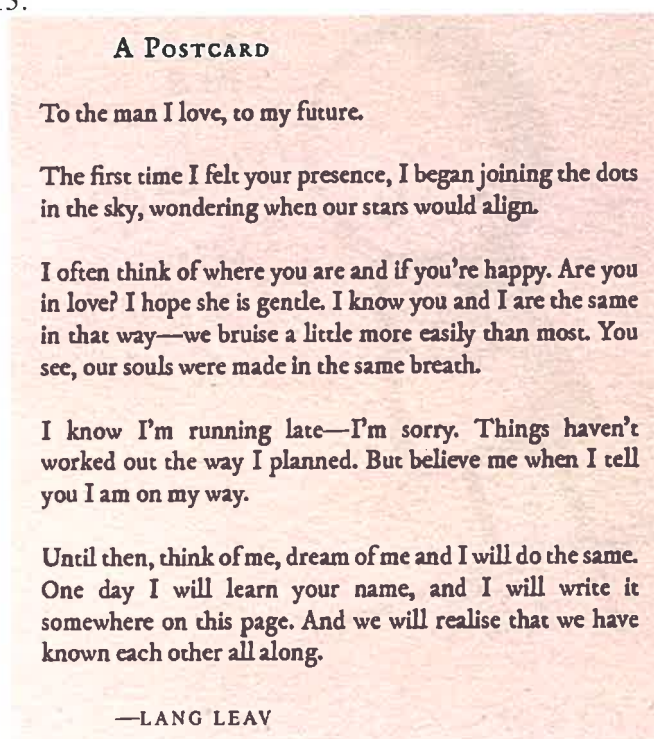
emoji all combined together to present a full idea. When each element is viewed in isolation it will not convey the full meaning as when all elements do together. The sentence "It hurts again" is not new to our ears and it does not specify whether the pain is physical, psychological or even sentimental, yet when it is viewed with the two other elements, the user manages to convey a confessional meaning exposing the idea of sentimental breakdown. The meaning conveyed from this trio can be put in words as follows: "My heart is hurting again, I am sad." Therefore, the whole outcome can be categorized according to its meaning under the dome of sentimental literautre as the author is expresses sorrow. Figure no. 12:

9,362 likes
wendyslookbook ☺

Another confessional writing can be witnessed with Lang Leav's employment of the epistolary style on this platform.[23] She posts a letter

sent to an anonymous man whom she addresses as her love and her future. She does not meet him yet, still addresses him, confessing her love the first time she felt his presence. Her caring feelings are exhibited in the form of questions inquiring for example whether he is happy or not. Then, she states that they share many things; in short, they are similar. She addresses her love as if he were waiting for her. She promises him to catch him up soon, asking him to remember her meanwhile. She gives another promise that she will write his name on the page someday. Writing the letter in the Figure no. 13:

A POSTCARD

To the man I love, to my future.

The first time I felt your presence, I began joining the dots in the sky, wondering when our stars would align.

I often think of where you are and if you're happy. Are you in love? I hope she is gentle. I know you and I are the same in that way—we bruise a little more easily than most. You see, our souls were made in the same breath.

I know I'm running late—I'm sorry. Things haven't worked out the way I planned. But believe me when I tell you I am on my way.

Until then, think of me, dream of me and I will do the same. One day I will learn your name, and I will write it somewhere on this page. And we will realise that we have known each other all along.

—LANG LEAV

The following example employs photos and words. The visual elements include the beloved, the sunset, the sky, two roses, and a seaside image, while the comprehensible context includes a sequence of events

beginning with what the poet used to consider his favorite, ending with what he now considers his faviorite. It also presents the reason of this change, which indicates the beloved. Employing this platform to infuse the visual elements of the picture with the comprehensible context of the words presents the idea of love and emphasizes it with the symbolic meaning of the roses and the sunset related to love and the idea that the poet has always

a picture of his beloved. Employing the visual elements supports the idea of love, giving it more depth and efffect even though the poem comprises two lines of verse.

Figure no. 14:

The next example employs free-style-short prose writing that cannot be published in printed media due to its shortness. It is not possible to publish a book; a newspaper; a booklet or even a paper for about twenty words. This platform makes it easy for short-prose writers to share their talent with the public reading to express feelings; saying or a piece of advice. The example employed presents the idea of the universally well-known pair of faliure and success. The idea presented here suggests that faliure is not that bad for one can look at its bright side as it will serve to show people the correct direction in their quest of success.

Figure no. 15:

♥ 594 likes

shamshom11 Failure is not a mistake.
It's a tool...a compass.
Failure will point you in the right direction ... Just keep moving!

Another example is Andrea Michelle's two-sentence post. She says: Figure no. 16:

andrea.michelle.official   4w

> Your name was a synonym
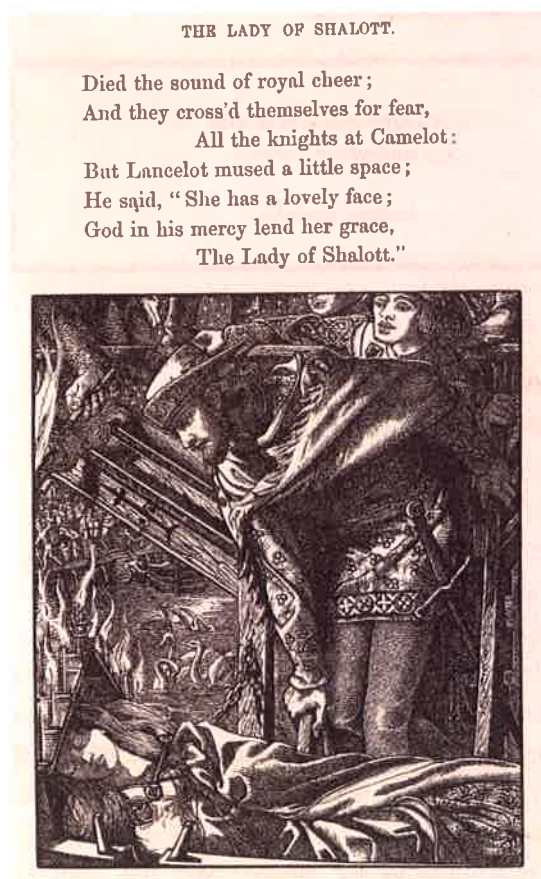> for endless adventure.
>
> andrea michelle

♥ 834 likes

andrea.michelle.official Take me with you ♥

The first sentence employs the contextual meaning of the word "synonym" to show in an exaggerated manner the similarity between the name of the person the poet addresses and the joy of adventures. Exaggeration is achieved by the word "endless," whereas the word "adventures" suggests continious renewal of the sources of joy. However, in the second sentece in the description area, the poet uses an imperative sentence in which she orders the addrressee to take her with him. The question "why might the use of the pronoun 'him' in the previous sentence" can be asked, and the answer lies in the following explanation: it is clear to the reader that the context of the two sentences written by the poet is romantic. The second sentece is imperative, which is somehow inappropirate to be usedby lovers. That is why the poet employs one of the features of this platform and adds the "♥" symbol to mitigate the effect of making it more demanding than imperative which is more suitable for this romantic context.

Having in mind, the questions raised already, a woman- poet and a romantic context need a "he" addressee. Once the imperative

meaning is lessened to a demand, the complete meaning conveyed will be confessional.

Figure no. 17

THE LADY OF SHALOTT.

Died the sound of royal cheer;
And they cross'd themselves for fear,
      All the knights at Camelot:
But Lancelot mused a little space;
He said, " She has a lovely face;
God in his mercy lend her grace,
      The Lady of Shalott."

The example in figure no. 17 presents a quotation supported by an image. The image, on the one hand, presnts an elederly couple walking together and leaving the readers behind, which may suggest the idea that they are leaving something undesired behind, or the idea of their detachment from the current world.

The following example is knit by Marina J. Rada, an Iraqi painter rather than a poet. She employs a picture taken from her everyday

situations. The picture captures one moment of the process of creating an artistic work, a paint, not that far from literature accroding to Plato's concept of imitation. The image employed exhibits several painting tools such as a painting knife, several brushes, and most importantly paints. They are the materials needed by the artist to create her painting. Moreover, she adds a comment right down the picture.

The comment seems to be the offshoot of a spontanious artistic nature rather than of something polished. It glibly springs at the moment of the creation of art. The comment comprises the expression "my weapons," which functions as a metaphor. The visual context is artistic whereas the textual one is arms-related. They are contradicted in meaning: art indicates peace, yet when the text is treated as a metaphor it makes a perfect sense. An artist without her tools is like a soldier without his weapons. The meaining is even supported more when it is related to the world this artist lives in. This artist is living in a country torn by wars against terrorism. It is a place where everyone fights in his own way: by weapons; words; or paintings.

This painter employs the metaphor combined with the picture to express a complex idea that might have slipped into her mind even for a fracture of a second. Moreover, the artist feels content about the idea conveyed via visual and textual elements which is indicted by her adding of the emoji which suggests the meanings of coolness and pride, which in turn suggests the meaning of the content. Her image-word-combined illustration recalls the works of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood illustrations, such as their illustration of Tennyson's poem "The Lady of Shalott."

Figure no. 18:

♡ ◯ ↗   ⋮

♥ 105 likes

marina_radaiovic My weapons 😎

Figure no. 19:

30

" We are from a time
where if something is broken
we fix it, not throw it away."

Old age is supported by the colors of the image which is presented in grayscale colors suggesting its antiquity. On the other hand, the quotation is said by a person who is criticizing life by means of mechanicized and technical context when the quotation includes "if something is broken we fix it," yet the meaning can be extended to be universalized to convey personal meaning like, for example, when people in the past fell in a problem, they attempt to solve it, whereas in the present, the new generation of today tends to leave it behind and looks for something new.

When the two meanings, the old age conveyed via the image of the old couple and the criticism embedded in the quotation, are combined together, they would function to imply that the old generation used to amend, solve and find solutions to problems they face in their life, whereas the generation nowadays tends to find alternatives and leave the faulty parts of their life behind.

There is one more example to illustrate another quotation by Rob Bell in which an optimistic tone is embedded. It suggests the advice that is to view hardships as a source of experience to make future life easier. The quotations tells people that if one can manage life in the darkest places, it would be no trouble to manage it in an illuminated place.

The meaning can be supported by a phrase from *The London and Westminster Review* which indicates the expression "beautiful effect produced by the sun on the mountain top." [3]

Figure no. 21:

"IF YOU CAN PAY ATTENTION IN THE
VALLEY, THEN YOU'RE GOING TO HAVE
NO PROBLEM PAYING ATTENTION
ON THE MOUNTAIN."

—ROB BELL
From Magic Lessons with Elizabeth Gilbert

#BIGMAGIC

The background employed is colorful which supports the bright optimistic meaning conveyed within the text. Moreover, this platform allows the author to categorize his literary outcome by means of a "#" under a certain keyword.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study suggests that societal media presented by Instagram platform influence the literary outcome published there. The study employs several literary examples to prove this suggestion. Examples presented vary in their subject, length, form and even language. These examples present several ways this platform influences literature, whether this influence is on form or subject matter. The platform also offers a chance for the revival and reuse of old literary styles such as the epistlory and the serialized

literature. Not to mention it makes certain literary styles flourish which include the blackout literature.

Example authors discussed are both amateur and experienced published authors from Asia, Africa, Europe and North America who involve multicultural elements and perspectives. As a result, it can be said that the literary outcome presented here is cosmopolitian since it employs multicultural elements and addresses audiences worldwide.

Examples here stand as a small portion of what can be read on Instagram, which serve as the first step leaving the doors open for other researchers to explore the other ways this platform influences literature.

NOTES

[1] Lisa Block de Behar et al, *Comparative Literature – Sharing Knowledge for Preserving Cultural Diversity*, Vol. 1, (United Kingdom: EOLSS Publishers Co Ltd., 2010), 265 – 266; Robert J. Loescher, "Pre-Columbian Art and Architecture," *Microsoft Student*, (Redmond, Washington: Microsoft Corporation, 2008), 1.

[2] "English Literature," *Microsoft Student*, (Redmond, Washington: Microsoft Corporation, 2008), 1 - 10.

[3] Janice Castro, "Journalism," *Microsoft Student*, (Redmond, Washington: Microsoft Corporation, 2008), 1; "Daniel Defoe," *Microsoft Student*, (Redmond, Washington: Microsoft Corporation, 2008), 1; "Jonathan Swift," *Microsoft Student*, (Redmond, Washington: Microsoft Corporation, 2008), 1.

[4] Behar et al., 265 – 266.

[5] "Internet," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, (Chicago: Encyclopædia

Britannica, 2013), 1.

6 "Blog," *Merriam-Webster's   Collegiate   Dictionary,*   Eleventh Edition, (Massachusetts: Britannica, 2003), n.p.

1 Behar et al., 265 – 266.

7 Michael Dewing, *Social Media: An Introduction*, (Ontario: Library of Parliament, 2010), 1 – 2.

8 ASCPL, "Instagram," (Ohio: Akron-Summit County Public Library, 2013), 1.

9 "Emoji," *Merriam-Webster's   Collegiate   Dictionary,*   Eleventh Edition, (Massachusetts: Britannica, 2003), n.p.

10 "Literary   Criticism,"   *Encyclopædia   Britannica,*   (Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica, 2013), 1.