



Twitter & world literature: The development of hashtag communities as a global writing practice

Christian Howard-Sukhil

University of California, Berkeley School of Law, United States

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Social media

Hashtags

Twitter / X

Contemporary literature

Global literature

ABSTRACT

As a popular writing form, Twitter / X literature (“Twitter Literature”) seems to have come and gone without leaving a lasting impression, and even the use of Twitter by well-known writers reached its peak in the early to mid-2010s. Around this same time, a number of scholars hailed the advent of Twitter literature as the next big thing, and they began analyzing the unique structures and affordances of this new literary form. Yet as Simone Murray aptly puts it, the failure of these “predictions to come to pass is not reason to abandon the question of the digital’s significance for literary culture.” Instead, Murray understands these failed predictions as examples of scholarly overreaching, and she urges that scholars of contemporary digital literature “provide better answers... attentive to the varied and sometimes contradictory permutations of contemporary digital culture.” As part of this effort to “provide better answers,” this article calls attention to the development of a new, global form of discourse that transcends social media publishing platforms: the hashtag.

The hashtag is a new symbol used in a performative act that calls into being a global community even as it stands as a descriptive signifier of a given text. This article examines the rhetoric and signification of the hashtag as a politically-inflected, transformative writing practice, specifically using the hashtag as a way of understanding the ambiguous writing practices developing on Twitter. By focusing particularly on the amateur writing community on Twitter, I analyze how this community has deployed hashtags to grow a global audience, advance political discussions, and circulate across linguistic borders, thereby creating a new kind of world literature independent of traditional and post-press publishing regulations.

As a popular writing form, Twitter / X literature (hereafter simply Twitter Literature) seems to have come and gone without leaving a lasting impression, and even the use of Twitter by well-known writers reached its peak in the early to mid-2010s. For instance, Teju Cole’s use of Twitter as a publication platform ran from 2011 to 2014, during which he wrote a series of pieces, including “Small Fates” in 2011, “Seven Short Stories about Drones” in 2013, and “Hafiz” and “A Piece of the Wall” in 2014 (see [Pearce 2011](#); [Cole 2013](#); [Anon., NPR 2014](#); [Brandom 2014](#)). In 2012, *The New Yorker* published Jennifer Egan’s short story “Black Box” both as a continuous short story on *The New Yorker’s* website and as a Twitter story ([Egan 2012](#)). Additionally, in 2014, David Mitchell wrote a Twitter-exclusive short story, “The Right Sort,” which eventually became *Slade House* (see [Flood 2014](#); [Mitchell 2015](#)). During this period, a number of scholars hailed the advent of Twitter literature as the next big thing, and they began analyzing the unique structures and affordances of this new literary form (see [Ruth Page 2012](#); [A. Aciman and E. Rensin 2009](#); [Bronwen Thomas 2014](#)). Yet as Simone Murray aptly puts it, the failure of these “predictions to come to pass is not reason to abandon the question of the digital’s sig-

nificance for literary culture” (2018, 1). Instead, Murray understands these failed predictions as examples of scholarly overreaching, and she urges scholars of contemporary digital literature to “provide better answers... attentive to the varied and sometimes contradictory permutations of contemporary digital culture” (2018, 1). As part of this effort to “provide better answers,” this article calls attention to the development of a new, global form of discourse that transcends social media publishing platforms: the hashtag. The hashtag is a new symbol used in a performative act that calls into being a global community even as it stands as a descriptive signifier of a given text. This article examines the rhetoric and signification of the hashtag as a politically-inflected, transformative writing practice, specifically using the hashtag as a way of understanding the ambiguous writing practices developing on Twitter.

Before diving into the analysis, a quick word about the state of Twitter itself. It is undeniable that Elon Musk’s takeover of Twitter has permanently altered both the experience and user base of the platform (see [Hutchinson 2022](#)). For instance, under Musk’s leadership, Twitter has altered the algorithms used to identify tweets for users’ newsfeeds and has made significant—and embattled—alterations around the blue checkmark system previously used to verify users’ identities ([Conger 2023](#)). Additionally, in the week following Musk’s takeover, over one million

E-mail address: chsukhil@berkeley.edu

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techum.2024.02.001>

Received 31 May 2023; Received in revised form 26 February 2024; Accepted 26 February 2024

2664-3294/© 2024 The Author(s). Published by Elsevier Ltd on behalf of Shanghai Jiao Tong University. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>)

Twitter accounts were either deactivated or suspended. In fact, according to the *MIT Technology Review*, “around 877,000 accounts were deactivated and a further 497,000 were suspended between October 27 and November 1 [2022]” (Stokel-Walker 2022). And by January 2023, the “number of people using Twitter in the US ha[d] decreased almost 9% since Elon Musk took over,” with the majority of those leaving identifying as Democrats (Notopoulos 2023). Additionally, Musk officially rebranded Twitter as “X” in 2023 (Davis 2023).¹

Despite these changes to both the platform itself and to the political makeup of Twitter users, Twitter remains an important platform for literary study for two reasons. First, Twitter is one of the longest and best-established social media platforms, with a large, global user base. Among social media platforms in particular, Twitter provides an important glimpse into global trends unavailable on newer, less popular platforms. Second, many of the trends—including the use of the hashtag—which began on Twitter have been imported onto other social media platforms. Even a cursory glance at Twitter’s new rival, Mastodon, reveals amateur writers and poets employing the techniques developed on Twitter to disseminate their literary works via Mastodon.² Thus, despite—and perhaps even because of—Twitter’s current precarious state, it remains vital to analyze the writing practices—particularly surrounding the use of the hashtag—that have developed on this social media platform.

The popularity of Twitter—and indeed, other social media sites—has not been ignored by literary scholars in recent years. In fact, numerous scholars have discussed the interactive nature of storytelling on social media (Piredda et al. 2015), the transmedial implications of fictional worlds (Harvey 2014; Zipfel 2014; Jensen et al. 2022), and the narratological possibilities of “electronic” literature and other online platforms (Ryan 2004; Toolan 2010; Dawson and Mäkelä 2020). Others have focused explicitly on Twitter as a new platform for literary works, though many of these articles have been short pieces by news outlets or else brief overviews of the development of Twitter writing (Beller 2013; Al Sharaqi and Abbasi 2016; Lam 2021; Rizer 2022). There are, nonetheless, three works deserve particular note in this context. First, Bronwen Thomas recently published a book titled *Literature and Social Media* (2020) that explores how social media can create both formal and informal literary networks. More specifically, Thomas “provide[s] an overview” of literary works found on Twitter, paying particular attention to experimentation and the “nowness” of “twitterfiction” (Thomas 2020, 49–64). In 2021, Thomas published another notable article, “The #bookstagram: Distributed Reading in the Social Media Age,” in which he analyzes reading on Instagram as a “situated activity” among the “#bookstagram” community (Thomas 2021, 4). In this same year, Miriam J. Johnson published *Books and Social Media: How the Digital Age is Shaping the Printed Word* (2021). Johnson argues that the “low barriers of entry to online spaces... [have made social media] a key meeting point for writers and readers,” and she describes the writers who develop an audience using these platforms as “citizen authors” (Johnson 2021, 1). These citizen authors rely upon multiple social media platforms—including Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Blogs, Instagram, Wattpad, and Medium—in order to “find and grow communities” (Johnson 2021, 100). These works indicate that there is growing interest in questions of audience and circulation that are enabled by social media and online spaces.

This article enters into this discussion by focusing on how the hashtag has facilitated the development, circulation, and consumption of social media literature, particularly Twitter literature. The article proceeds in four parts. Part 1 analyzes the history of the hashtag and its adoption by the literary community on Twitter. In Part 2, I examine the rise of

post-press literature and the digital literary sphere, situating the development of Twitter literature within this digital literary space. Part 3 examines what it means for Twitter to serve as a publication platform by parsing how the reading community has developed around Twitter literature. Finally, Part 4 connects the global circulation of Twitter literature to the unique political and translation practices that characterize the social media platform.

Part 1: The development of the hashtag on social media

The hashtag has a long history of use well before its social media applications, and as a symbol, the hashtag is curious for several reasons. First, the symbol or sign known as the hashtag (#) does not have a single signifier, and this symbol is sometimes pronounced as the “pound” sign, the “number” sign, or simply the “hash.” This contrasts with another commonly-used symbol, the @ sign, which corresponds to a single phoneme, “at.” Second, the lines and angles of the symbol are critical in distinguishing it from other similar symbols. The hashtag symbol must be rendered as two parallel lines intersecting two more parallel lines that are angled at approximately 80 degrees (like two forward slashes). This forward slant helps distinguish the hashtag from the “sharp” sign in music (rendered as #) or the “equal and parallel to” symbol in mathematics (≡) (see Chakelian 2014). The hashtag sign thus seems overdetermined in its symbology while remaining underdetermined in its signification, and the use of a simple keyboard convenience of ambiguous meaning has made the hashtag an eloquent and performative symbol ripe for analysis.

As it is currently used on social media platforms, the hashtag was first deployed on Twitter in 2007 by Chris Messina, who worked as a developer at Google. Messina’s original tweet read: “how do you feel about using # (pound) for groups. As in #barcamp [msg]?” (see Image 1). About his choice of sign, Messina has commented: “I wanted to offer a simple way for the Twitter community to organize itself. Twitter didn’t support groups, so I figured the next best thing to do was to use the text of a tweet to indicate topicality” (Chakelian 2014). Messina references organization and topicality, which echo the ways that computer programmers have used this symbol. While the hashtag may be most familiar to people as a number or “pound” sign, its current use on social media platforms most closely corresponds to its history in computing. In many computer scripting languages, the hashtag marker is used as a comment code, and information following the hashtag is not executable code but rather explanatory text or commentary inserted by the programmer to help others who might be using that code. This usage was popularized by the “Perl” programming language developed by Larry Wall in 1987. More recently, markdown (a “lightweight” markup language that uses plain-text formatting syntax) uses hashtags as heading markers, and the text immediately following the hashtag sign is rendered as a section header when the markdown is converted to html. For computing purposes, then, hashtags are used to help programmers understand the code and to organize text into clear and easily decipherable sections. The hashtag as it is now used on social media thus taps into its use within computer scripting languages by serving as a kind of metadata tag that allows Twitter users to sort through and easily identify common communities and interests.

The peculiar communal and organizing function that the hashtag now plays on social media is further discussed by the techno-sociologist Zeynep Tufekci in her book, *Twitter and Tear Gas: The Power and Fragility of Networked Protest*, which directly addresses how “digital technologies alter the spatial and temporal architecture of society” (2017, 129). Discussing Twitter explicitly, Tufekci states:

[O]ne of Twitter’s affordances is openness to user experimentation and reappropriation. Users can take tools that were meant to do one thing and find ways to use them in significantly different ways, such as hashtags, a Twitter feature allowing people to congregate around

¹ Given that many people still continue to refer to the platform by its original name and that the tweets cited in this article are from the pre-X era, I will refer to X as “Twitter” throughout.

² For a specific example, see Conclusion below.

various topics. ...Hashtags are an innovation developed by users, as was the use of the @ sign to ping a user on the site. (2017, 129)

As Tufekci as indicated, hashtags have played an important role in uniting various individuals under a specific cause or movement. One of these movements has been the creation of a global literary community that is connected via Twitter. Indeed, while Tufekci focuses primarily upon the role that Twitter plays in facilitating political protest, I'd like to extend the implications of Twitter's social and political role to the literary scene.

Given the opportunistic repurposing of keyboard symbols and the deliberate skewing inherent in creative writing, the concept of "Twitter literature" deserves some clarification. In this context, I use the term "literature" to refer strictly to fictional or poetic works, rather than a larger, more utilitarian body of printed matter (as in "medical literature" or "political literature"). But as the ambiguous usage of this term suggests, what constitutes fictional or poetic works—questions about quality or aesthetics—is under debate. My argument makes no claims about the quality or aesthetic merit of the fictional and poetic works that constitute Twitter literature. Rather, in the spirit of Stanley Fish, literary hashtag communities on Twitter show that "the act of recognizing literature is not constrained by something in the text, nor does it issue from an independent and arbitrary will; rather, it proceeds from a collective decision that will be in force only so long as a community of readers or believers continues to abide by it" (Fish 1980, 11). While it may be ephemeral and time-specific, Twitter literature is partly defined as such by the communities that hail it and call it into being. These communities identify themselves through hashtags, particularly hashtags that signify literary form or genre (e.g., #haiku or #veryshortstory).³ In short, Twitter literature identifies itself as such through the rhetorical act of being associated with a literary hashtag community.

While a number of different hashtags may signify that a given tweet could be classified as Twitter literature, each specific hashtag delineates a set or class of tweets. For example, tweets tagged with #poem and those tagged with #flashfiction both fall under the umbrella of "Twitter literature," but the specific hashtag used also delineates the genre or characteristics of that tweet. As such, hashtag communities are similar to genre markers in that they signify a set of relations or classes among the tweets that constitute each hashtag community. Perhaps more importantly, these hashtags function according to a "theory of interconnection" by clustering around a specific topic or interest group, such as #fictioncommunity (Dimock 2008, 74). Yet hashtag communities are also different from genre classifications in that the genres or communities indicated by hashtags do not arise from the text itself; rather, they come into being through an act of summoning.

Additionally, hashtag communities are innately outward-facing or audience-oriented; they are meant to unite a particular audience rather than simply signify the content of a tweet. Elizabeth Losh (2020) writes: "In many ways hashtags are a mechanism for the *redistribution of the sensible*, by making particular kinds of content more perceptible to potential audiences. Text, images, and video tagged with [specific hashtags] can gain visibility by jumping to the top of a user's social media queue. The act of labeling a chunk of data shines a spotlight on it for a heterogeneous audience" (56; emphasis in original). Analyzing this purpose in relation to the literary community on Twitter, we can see that not all of the tweets tagged by literary hashtags are necessarily works of literature. Some of these tweets promote literary competitions or publication opportunities, while others reference works-in-progress or display images of writers' manuscripts. While the use of literary hashtags may help garner an audience, we can further delineate Twitter literature as tweets

that are identified as such through literary hashtags and that have the clear rhetoric of being literary.

While we are faced with both a special complexity and urgency in examining this new form of discourse (particularly given the many changes that Twitter has recently undergone), we are nonetheless still in the midst of its development. Therefore, rather than proposing a definition, I'd like to discuss what it means that there is a literary community developing on Twitter—and on social media platforms more broadly. The growing phenomenon of Twitter literature and the community surrounding it deserve sustained scholarly attention whether or not we agree that such literature meets the standards or forms defined by the literary community. Some of the questions that the growth of Twitter literature raises are: What implications do digital, literary hashtag communities have for literature as a field of study? How does Twitter literature alter publication practices? What are the affordances of publishing literary works via Twitter? How are literary hashtag communities changing the circulation of literary works around the globe?

Part 2: Digital literary space and the growth of the Twitter writing community

I've referred to Twitter as an alternative publication platform, but what exactly does this mean? How does Twitter fit into the larger publishing market, and why would anyone choose to publish their literary work on Twitter? The "traditional," print-bound publishing industry has contracted significantly over the past few decades, and scholars such as Nick Levey (2016) have highlighted the rise of "post-press" literature, or the self-publication of literary works using online services such as Amazon Kindle. While traditional print and post-press literature may be the most common forms of literary production, there is nonetheless a growing number of alternative publication and production models, especially given the rise of the Internet and online spaces. Murray (2015) has defined the "digital literary sphere" as the "broad array of book-themed websites and other digital content whose focus is contemporary literature and its production, circulation, and consumption" (313). While the digital literary sphere encompasses post-press literature, it also extends beyond it by including literary works produced or published on blogs and other social media sites. Aarthi Vadde has analyzed the production and exchange of information within the larger digital literary sphere, and she has concluded that, in contrast to print and post-press literature, non-commercialized sites in the digital literary sphere function according to a gift culture. Vadde (2017) writes: "Most social media users are hostile to seeing their creativity and information commodified by platforms, yet amenable to sharing both with other users in the name of contributing to an online community" (31). Non-commodified websites and social media platforms that are part of the digital literary sphere thus emphasize community over profit, operating through a gift-culture model.

Recognizing the seemingly priceless, free production and dissemination of literature online, Amy Hungerford in *Making Literature Now* has identified two kinds of reading experiences within the digital literary sphere. Hungerford contrasts two efforts by the publisher Richard Nash to establish an online reading and writing community.⁴ The first of these was a work-shopping and publishing website called "Red Lemonade" that was freely available for use. Red Lemonade was Nash's attempt to create a community in which online writers commented upon and edited one another's work, supported by publishers who "facilitate[d] and [drew] profit from, the writer's work from earliest drafts through the design, printing, and distribution of books, all the way to the process of cultural uptake" (Hungerford 2016, 74). Nash's profit model

³ It should also be noted that, while I focus on the use of literary hashtags on social media, hashtag usage far exceeds this kind of genre classification. For more information on other uses of hashtags (including as a means of signaling place, disseminating a slogan, or serving as a call to action), see Losh (2020).

⁴ In many ways, Nash's efforts are similar to other social media sites like Twitter and Facebook, but his initiatives are intended exclusively for an audience of writers and readers.

was to sell the software (called “Cursor”) that powered Red Lemonade. Although this venture ultimately failed, Hungerford sees Red Lemonade as an example of the fusing of “two models of cultural capital: the hipness economy of tech, and the hipness economy of literary culture” (Hungerford 2016, 79).

After Red Lemonade, Nash created a website called “Small Demons” in his second effort to establish an online writing community. Small Demons was a “fully clickable concordance” in the form of a website that enabled people to “explore all the ‘people, places, and things’ that appear in novels” (Hungerford 2016, 79). Small Demons offered a unique vision of the fusion between literary and commodity cultures, and Hungerford (2016) states that this “second version of the novel in the net ...also sells experience, but here the experience is consumption rather than the sort of reading and writing community feeling that Red Lemonade aimed to foster. Want to drink the cocktail that Sam Spade likes best? You could track it down on Small Demons. The site’s developers aimed to produce an app: one click and you buy a book and all the songs in it” (81). Although Small Demons also ultimately failed as an enterprise, Hungerford (2016) argues that the efforts of both Red Lemonade and Small Demons indicate the growing interest in both online writing communities and the “social meanings that cluster around [the novel’s] forms and subgenres” (81). Hungerford’s analysis of these enterprises within the digital literary sphere suggests two things about efforts to use free sites as publication platforms: First, that writers initially turn to these models because they “produce cool” or are a new fad, but that these tools ultimately don’t meet the needs of writers and consumers; and second, that these models generally fail precisely because they are unsustainable from a business standpoint.

While it is free for its users, Twitter’s revenue model is based on advertisements, which often target users based on identity characteristics, including age, gender, marital status, and location.⁵ Moreover, because it does not cater to a niche literary market, this revenue model is unlikely to fail if the literary community were to cease using Twitter. The greater concern, however, is whether Twitter has simply appealed to writers because of its new “cool” factor. And as Simone Murray (2015) has shown, once the cool factor wears off, the writing community on Twitter might radically diminish or disappear entirely, as occurred with hypertext fiction. Since Twitter literature is still fairly young (Twitter only having been established in 2006), it is difficult to determine the longevity of Twitter as a publication platform. Several scholars (Murray foremost among them) have asserted that Twitter’s popularity as a publication platform has already come and gone. Murray uses the online writer’s festival, #TwitterFictionFestival (#TFF), as evidence of Twitter’s failure to secure itself as a literary platform. But Murray (2018) bases her conclusions on #TFF’s reliance on “established literary authors whose status had already been abundantly secured through print publication,” which she claims was “essential for bringing a degree of literary respectability to the initiative” (106). In other words, the success or failure of Twitter as a publication platform is being judged by the degree to which authors who are already established through print publications employ Twitter for the publication of their literary works.

This is the wrong criterion by which to measure the larger influence of Twitter among amateur or non-traditionally-published writers. What we need, then, is an empirical way of measuring the popularity of Twitter among the digital—rather than print-based—writing community over time. Most studies that analyze Twitter popularity rely upon the number of likes, retweets, and followers for their statistical analyses. For example, in their geographic analysis of the Twitter network (using a large dataset of over 51.9 million user accounts), Juhi Kulshreshtha et al. (2012) found that “more than a third of all tweets are

exchanged across national boundaries” (202). Kulshreshtha et al. (2012) determined that “both linguistic similarity and geographical proximity play a significant role in shaping the users’ online interactions,” and they concluded that international tweets are more likely to occur among individuals who share similar “political, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds, which in turn facilitate greater communication between them” (202). But like most studies of interactions on Twitter, this study used number of followers, retweets, and likes, as well as direct pings (using the @ to respond to a particular Twitter user) to define online interactions. These methods, however, are only able to gauge the relative popularity of a single tweet or Twitter user rather than measuring the popularity of a large group or community on Twitter.

Back in 2010, Joseph Tabbi (2010) suggested an alternative method for measuring online interactions through his analysis of electronic literature, or e-lit. At the time, Tabbi described the “world system” of online spaces as largely “potential,” dependent of its full realization on the development of a socially-driven Internet, more commonly known as Web 2.0, that allows for the dynamic sharing of content by users through blogs and social media platforms. While it began to be realized as early as 2004, Web 2.0 owes much of its current shape to the popularization (in the early to mid-2010s) of social media sites (including Twitter), which have encouraged mass user participation—rather than a merely passive viewing—in online spaces. It is worth quoting Tabbi (2010) at length:

The Semantic Web project (Web 2.0), to realize itself, depends on the adoption of Web standards and a certain a priori agreement in principle by practitioners in numerous fields, among which literature is unlikely to take the lead... What is found during electronic searches would depend, in principle, not on a matching of character strings but on the identification of metadata and the development of a terminological vocabulary shared among numerous content providers, creators of literary works among them. Not all texts on the Internet would be so marked, but those that do conform to a developing conceptual vocabulary would be available to searches and (proponents argue) would reinforce and be reinforced by other texts using a conforming vocabulary. This conformity at the level of the database, however, should not produce conceptual uniformity: new names, hybrids, and descriptors can be created continually. The development of the field would in some sense *be* the change in the frequency with which certain names are used and others drift into disuse. (36; emphasis in original)

Tabbi’s emphasis upon “conceptual connections” and “metatags” gestures toward an alternative method of understanding and measuring interactions among Web 2.0 users. Vitality, such connections are determined by “practitioners in numerous fields,” dependent upon a shared “terminological vocabulary,” selectively “reinforced” by those texts that conform to this vocabulary, and allow for the continuous creation of “new names, hybrids, and descriptors” by users. This is where the hashtag comes into play. Although Tabbi never mentions the hashtag, we have seen that hashtags are self-identifying markers of a community, and individuals who have never met yet who are united by similar interests (rather than geographical proximity) are able to connect through hashtag communities. Additionally, hashtags serve a communal and organizing function even as they allow for user experimentation and the creation of new hashtag terms. I thus argue that the numerical measurement of a particular hashtag’s usage over time can indicate the relative size and strength of a particular community on Twitter.

As Tabbi presciently noted, the literary community on Web 2.0 did not develop the hashtag as an organizing or communal tool, but this did not prevent its adaptation by members of the Twitter literary community. In fact, using literary hashtags as a standard of reference, we can measure the growth in the use of Twitter as an international literary forum. Between 2014 and 2017, there was a 600% increase in the use of Twitter as a space for literary engagement. In 2019 alone, over two million tweets were identified as related to the writing community

⁵ It is worth noting that this model may be changing. For instance, Elon Musk recently monetized the blue checkmark (Lerman 2022). Additionally, Europe’s Digital Services Act will likely reshape the use of targeted advertising on online platforms (see Bonifacic 2022).

(using hashtags such as #fictioncommunity, #poetrycommunity, #writingcommunity, #writernetwork, and #writerslife). Similarly, there has been an explosion of growth in the use of hashtags that identify tweets according to literary genre, and in 2019, there were over 1.1 million instances in which a Twitter poem or story was tagged according to genre (these hashtags include #haiku, #flashfiction, #microfiction, #micropoem, #tanka, #twifi, #twitterature, #twitterpoem, and #twitterstory) (see [Graph 1](#)). These data indicate a growing literary culture that is fusing literary and social concerns in a public and visible way.⁶

But even more than simply growing in popularity, trends in the literary hashtag community on Twitter suggest that Twitter literature as a genre is becoming more stable, even though more acclaimed writers (such as Jennifer Egan and Teju Cole) have cut back on their use of Twitter as a publication platform. We can break down the literary hashtag communities into two primary groups: those that explicitly reference Twitter (such as #poetryontwitter, #poetweet, #twifi, #twific, and #twitterature) and those that merely reference the literary form (such as #micropoetry or #tanka). The resulting analysis shows that the use of hashtags related to form (with no reference to Twitter) has exploded, reaching over 1.4 million in 2015, after which the use of these hashtags has leveled off at around 1.1 million instances per year. Hashtags related to Twitter as specific publication platform, however, have seen short bursts of enthusiasm, reaching a peak in 2014 at nearly 87,000 tweets before plummeting sharply. And in 2019, there were just over 10,000 uses of hashtags that explicitly referenced Twitter as a publication platform (see [Graph 2](#)).⁷ Furthermore, the literary hashtags that relate to form have much more gradually changed in popularity compared with their Twitter-inflected counterparts. From such data, we can conclude that Twitter as a publication platform is stabilizing, and writers are publishing poems and short stories on Twitter not because Twitter represents a new “fad” (as hashtags related to Twitter as a writing form might indicate) but because Twitter has facilitated the publication and effortless sharing of shortened forms of writing.

While the use of literary hashtags is not confined to a single online platform, it is worth maintaining our focus on the Twitter literary community in order to better tease out developments, trends, and drawbacks that the Web 2.0 writing community faces. So for the remainder of this article, I’ll examine how the Twitter writing community uses hashtags to develop a global audience, advance political discussions, and circulate across linguistic borders.

Part 3: Defining a reading community

The stabilization of Twitter as a literary publication platform necessarily raises questions of audience, which we can break down into two primary questions: Who has access to Twitter (socioeconomically and geographically speaking)? And once on Twitter, how does a writer attract an audience? While a greater number of people may have access to free digital texts—including work published on Twitter—than print-based subscriptions, these digital spaces have boundaries and limitations of a different kind, boundaries that are linked to access and socioeconomic standing. Aarthi Vadde (2017) has analyzed the audience of a different online writing platform, Wattpad, pointing to the high prices of physical devices (including smart phones and tablets) as a primary obstacle for lower socio-economic groups to participate in these online writing communities. Specifically, she argues that, despite the increasing accessibility of the Internet, there is an economic and educational bar to the participation in the online writing community, a bar that is tied to the underlying materiality of social media (Vadde 2017, 40).

⁶ For a detailed analysis of the growing literary community on Twitter, including the methods used to gather this data, see [Howard-Sukhil \(2020\)](#).

⁷ Detailed information (including additional charts and graphs) are available on the *Project TwitLit* website ([Howard-Sukhil 2020](#)).

Without trying to undermine Vadde’s important observation, we need to acknowledge the changing nature of technology and accessibility. Vadde’s statistics were collected in 2014; since this time, many developing countries—most notably the BRICS collective (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa)—have greatly invested in technology development, and together, these countries account for over 17% of the world’s total investment in technology research and development ([Anon., Xinhuanet.com 2017](#)). Twitter’s user base is also much larger than Wattpad’s, reaching over 353 million active monthly users in early 2021, nearly 81 percent of whom live outside of the U.S. ([Newberry 2021](#)). And according to [Eric Chemi \(2015\)](#), these users are, on average, in the lowest income bracket. In her analysis of the global Twitter community, Zeynep Tufekci (2017) writes:

[A]s digital technology has rapidly become less expensive, it has just as rapidly spread... to poorer groups. ...This isn’t because people leave behind race, gender, and social class online, and this isn’t because the online sphere is one only of reason and ideas, with no impact from the physical world. Quite the opposite, such dimensions of the human experience are reproduced and play a significant role in the networked public sphere as well. The difference is the reconfigured logic of how and where we can interact; with whom; and at what scale and visibility. (11)

Thus, the circulation of Twitter may be limited by a threshold of capital needed to purchase physical equipment, but even this threshold is becoming less of an obstacle.

Among those who do have access to Twitter, a writer has to cultivate an audience of readers. This process differs depending upon the writer’s status outside of Twitter. That is, pre-established and celebrated writers (generally through print publications) rely primarily upon their cultural capital to reach an audience. The Nigerian American writer Teju Cole has creatively employed social media platforms—including Instagram and Twitter—to disseminate his stories to a global audience. About his decision to employ different media for the publication of his work, Cole states:

I actually do have to work hard for whatever attention my work gets. Sometimes it would involve publishing something in *The New Yorker*, which has a subscription base and an established audience, and sometimes it involves using media or a forum that is not necessarily associated with, you know, very serious work. ...A lot of the people I want to be read by, a lot of the people I want to speak to, are not people who have subscriptions to *The New Yorker* or *The New York Times*, so it’s important for me to speak to them in this way also. ([Martin and Cole 2014](#))

As admirable as Cole’s statement is, he remains extraordinarily vague about what “work[ing] hard for whatever attention [his] work gets” actually entails, and his comments specifically acknowledge educational and economic disparities between the average print and online audiences. Certainly, Twitter literature does not function through a “subscription base,” nor does it have an “established audience” like *The New Yorker*.⁸ So how exactly does Cole attract an audience for his work on Twitter and on other social media sites? Cole does not employ any special hashtags in his fictional tweets, nor does he reach out to the literary community on Twitter in any visible way. Rather, most of the attention that Cole’s work on social media receives comes from author interviews or other articles about Cole’s innovative use of social media. In short, the attention that Cole receives is predicated on the fact that he is already

⁸ In contrast to Twitter, the print circulation of *The New York Times* is estimated at a mere 1.6 million (interestingly, the digital subscription outstrips the print circulation at 5.09 million). In 2016, *The New Yorker* had a subscription base of just over one million, which grew to 1.27 million in 2018 (the latest statistics available). Of its subscribers, 84 percent have graduated from college, and the median net worth of its subscribers is over one million dollars. See [Djordjevic \(2021\)](#); [Conde Nast \(2016\)](#); and [Edmonds \(2018\)](#).

a well-established author who has published in prestigious venues such as *The New Yorker*.

But what of the writers who are not well-established yet who nevertheless publish their literary works on Twitter? How do they attract an audience and a following? Miriam J. Johnson has discussed how writers and publishers alike often harness multiple social media platforms to develop an audience (Johnson 2021, 100). These writers have discovered the importance of employing hashtags to grow an audience beyond their immediate network. As Johnson puts it: “These authors who are publishing on Twitter, by hashtagging their work, are inserting it into a searchable database of tagged tweets that will appeal to a wider range of readers who follow certain hashtags, expanding their reach beyond their own personal Twitter feed” (2021, 101). Indeed, the circulation of literary tweets is encouraged by the hashtags that help define Twitter literature, for these hashtags allow writers from different national and social communities to interact immediately. For example, Susan Gunelius (2018) has provided advice for blog writers to connect to appropriate audiences and gain more followers. She writes, “You can increase traffic to your blog with Twitter in a variety of ways, but if you’re not including the right Twitter hashtags in your tweets, then you’re missing a huge opportunity to increase the number of people who see and share your tweets” (Gunelius 2018). Similarly, Caitlin Muir (2018) has blogged about “44 Essential Twitter Hashtags Every Author Should Know,” stating, “Used correctly, Twitter hashtags are one of the best ways to connect with industry experts, readers, and other authors.” Hashtags have thus served as one way in which Twitter writers attract an audience for their work.

In his analysis of forms of discourse on “Black Twitter,” André Brock (2012) has discussed hashtags as a “signifyin’ practice” that “invites an audience” (539). More specifically, the hashtag acts as a “signal that the Twitterer is part of a larger community and displays her knowledge of the practice, the discourse, and the group’s worldview” (Brock 2012, 539). For writers on Twitter, this signaling practice must often span multiple audiences and communities. For instance, Rick Dove tweeted the following poem: “And I have become / unseen / some so busy / not seeing race / that they / erased me... / © Rick Dove” (see Image 2).⁹ The hashtags accompanying the poem signal both literary and social communities: #BlackLivesMatter, #poem, and #micropoetry. Dove’s tweet is unusual in that he included a copyright sign while tweeting from his personal account, which legally renders the “© Rick Dove” redundant. Yet by including the copyright sign, Dove makes his participation in the literary community obvious to his audiences. The copyright sign also serves a practical purpose: if and when Dove’s poem is retweeted, anyone who views the retweets will be forced to see and acknowledge Dove as poet. Dove’s very writing practices are thus influenced by his desire to speak to multiple audiences, and he employs a redundant signal to span both writing and Black Lives Matter communities.

Increasingly often, words that might carry a specific meaning are appropriated by Twitter writing communities in order to reach a larger audience. This practice is partially due to the decentralized nature of Twitter: without standard hashtag terms or limits on what words can be made into hashtag groups, there are dozens of hashtags that signal writing communities. While some of these hashtags signal a specific group (like #queerfiction and #blackscifi), others are applied more liberally. The hashtags tanka and haiku, for instance, are often used within the same tweet, despite signaling different poetic forms. Tanka is a Japanese genre of poetry that consists of five lines and 31 syllables that are usually ordered in the following line pattern: 5/7/5/7/7. Haiku, on the other hand, is a Japanese poetic form of three lines with the syllable count: 5/7/5. Twitter poets have appropriated these terms, using them as rallying points for their poetic communities. For instance, the Twitter poet

Michael H. Lester uses the hashtags #tanka, #haiku, #micropoetry, and #haiga in a single tweet (see Image 3). Lester does not follow the syllable count for either tanka or haiku; rather, he uses these hashtags to gain a wider circulation of his works by inserting it into pre-existing channels of poetic communication.

Perhaps a more extreme example of the use of hashtags for inclusion within various writing communities is the poem by user @FeelingIdeaWord, which even spans linguistic communities (see Image 4). This user has not only used hashtags in both English and Arabic, but he has tagged the tweet with contradictory and even incorrect hashtags, such as #five-lines (the poem is four), #tenwords (it is 14), #haiku and #tanka (it fits neither form), and #veryshortstory, #vss (which stands for very short story), and #micropoetry (which is it: a short story or a poem?).¹⁰ Like Michael Lester, @FeelingIdeaWord is attracting a readership through deliberate category errors. Thus, rather than simply identifying the form or content of a tweet, hashtags have become a means by which writers and poets on Twitter easily identify one another and speak to specific audiences regardless of national boundaries.

Part 4: Political hashtags, translation, and the circulation of twitter literature

The political nature of Twitter is inseparable from the trans-linguistic, international circulation of tweets. In fact, given its popularity with former President Donald Trump, the political nature of Twitter is undeniable. But rather than simply serving as a mouthpiece for those in power, Twitter has also been employed for politically-subversive movements. In *Twitter and Teargas*, Zeynep Tufekci (2017) has shown the instrumental role that Twitter played during the Arab Spring revolt. Writers and other artists have similarly capitalized upon the political affordances of Twitter. For well-known writers such as Teju Cole, Twitter has become an obvious vehicle through which to publish political critiques, and Cole has particularly used Twitter to address what he calls the “empathy gap” between the U.S. public and those whose lives are affected by U.S. policy (particularly U.S. foreign policies).¹¹ Yet even for lesser-known writers, Twitter has become a political vehicle, a practice that is facilitated precisely because of the hashtag.

Hundreds of these lesser-known Twitter writers have combined literary or poetic texts with political hashtags. These political hashtags address a wide variety of issues—such as the refugee crisis, DACA, and Black Lives Matter—and implicate dozens of nations, including the United States, Syria, Canada, Israel, and Palestine. One Twitter poem (published on Twitter in 2017 by M.A. Istvan Jr.), reads: “refugees in violent disagreement / on an indefinite road concerning / how to make the staple dish” (see Image 5). The hashtags associated with this tweet include: #Refugees, #RefugeesWelcome, #syria, #syrianchildren, #RefugeeCamp, #refugeecrisis, #micropoem, #micropoetry, #recipe, #RecipeOfTheDay, and #Food. Even though there is no reference to Syrian refugees in the text of the Twitter poem itself, the hashtags “syria” and “syrianchildren” clearly identify the author’s particular subject. These hashtags also augment the content of the tweet by lending it a kind of textured imagery, and the reader easily fills in details by picturing the unidentified refugees as Syrian refugees in a refugee camp. Additionally, #refugeecrisis suggests that the writer is aware of the social and political debate over the status of refugees, while #RefugeesWelcome indicates that the writer advocates for more open borders. The last few hashtags are particularly curious, for they position the tweet within the food and cooking communities. With these conjunctions of dissimilar categories, the author evokes amusement as well as surprise. For instance, the #RecipeOfTheDay is a Twitter channel that showcases

¹⁰ The Arabic hashtags also translate to #veryshortstory and the Arabic equivalent of #vss. Translation courtesy of Mohamed Morsy.

¹¹ Especially see Cole’s 2013 Twitter short story series titled simply, “Seven Short Stories about Drones” (Zhang 2013).

⁹ Please note that I received permission from all quoted Twitter poets and authors to use their tweets in full.

images of culinary dishes and features links to the corresponding recipes. But by identifying this Twitter poem with this hashtag, the writer interrupts this culinary community, injecting his or her poetic and political message and implying that this culinary community could also benefit from the recipes that Syrian refugees might contribute to the channel—if only those refugees were welcomed. In short, hashtags associated with self-identified literary and poetic tweets can reveal authorial implications and political subtexts even as they disseminate the tweet among what might seem unlikely communities.

The dissemination of tweets among diverse communities is likewise facilitated by the trans-linguistic practices both online and more specifically on Twitter. In his discussion of new global trends in online spaces, Stephen Owen (2014) has observed the move to create online language communities that defy national and political borders. He states:

On the Web we see clearly the resurgence of national language communities detached from nation-states. ...Clear hierarchies of authority in literary judgment have been replaced by interest groups of invisible membership and scattered through terminals everywhere. In place of the cultural establishments of nation-states, charged with defining literary history and canon (these have their Web sites as well), we have an immaterial medievalism of shifting texts and authors, working in an e-space that is peculiarly local. (Owen 2014, 254)

While Owen discusses all forms of online interaction, his statements are particularly pertinent to Twitter, which, as we have seen, allows authors to use hashtags to self-identify their work as belonging to specific communities. Indeed, because they are connected by a clearly defined set of interests (delineated by specific hashtags), the writing community on Twitter connects international users who hold a common interest or support a common goal. But whereas Owen claims that these online language communities are transnational albeit insular (that is, only those who speak or write in English connect with English sites, only those who speak or write in Spanish connect with Spanish sites, etc.), hashtag communities on Twitter easily enable Twitter users to associate with different language groups. For instance, an increasing number of non-English Twitter poets and writers have been using English-language hashtags to circulate their work more widely. As such, the circulation and community translation practices of Twitter have profound implications upon Twitter's ability to serve as a political vehicle for authors.

Twitter employs different translation practices than most other forms of publication. As of December 2022, Twitter allows users to change their official language preference to one of 34 languages, including Bengali, Korean, Malay, Russian, and Thai (Anon., Twitter Developer Platform 2022). Yet the user's language preference neither determines nor restricts the language in which the user can Tweet. According to the Twitter Language Support Center, "Setting the language only affects the language of Twitter elements such as action text and timestamp display; Tweet text is always displayed in its originally authored language" (Anon., Twitter Developer Platform 2022). The "originally authored language" is not regulated by Twitter; rather, anyone who has a Twitter account can tweet in whatever language is supported by their phone or keypad.

Moreover, on February 14, 2011, Twitter launched its "Twitter Translation Center" to promote linguistic exchange through community-oriented development (Twitter Translation Center 2013). While the Translation Center was originally user-driven, in November 2017, Twitter partnered with Bing Translator, which provided automated translations for over 60 listed languages (Anon., Twitter Developer Platform 2022).¹² Partly in response to user feedback, Twitter ended its relationship with Bing and partnered with Google Translate in March

2019 (Anon., Rahul 2019). While tweet translations using both Bing and Google Translate have been far from perfect (especially in so-called "minor" languages), Twitter nonetheless offers a kind of online, digital translation that is both immediate and unregulated by market forces and the publishing business. As such, literary works on Twitter circulate more quickly and more widely, reaching an audience that is not determined by the cultural, historical, and political forces governing traditional and post-press publications.

While Twitter's automated translation practices are one way of circulating tweets globally, another is through an author's deliberate targeting of a specific language community through hashtags. Specifically, Twitter enables speakers of minor languages to reclaim their identity and upset the assumptions of the majority through the deliberate interruption of specific linguistic communities. Take, for instance, the poem "I wish," by Khalid Lone, which Lone tweeted in Urdu on March 8, 2020 (see Image 6). This poem roughly translates as:

I wish you had remembered me in times of separation,
Wish you had soothed my wretched heart for a while.
The charm that I lost after you broke ties with me,
Ahh! I wish you had looked back once before leaving.
The heart would have been filled with joy and comfort,
Only if you had come to see me in sickness for a while.
The destiny of my love was well-known:
If only I could have been released from the chain of your memories.
Oh, beloved! Even if you were occupied with your associates,
I wish you had given me a ritual burial...¹³

While this poem could be read as a simple love poem, Lone uses language as a political vehicle. Lone has written his poem in Urdu, providing no English translation in the original tweet. Nonetheless, Lone circulated the poem among the English-language community on Twitter, transliterating the Urdu to Roman characters. Additionally, Lone has tagged the poem with #PoetryByMe and #UrduPoetry. Urdu is, of course, a minority language within the English-language community, and most people within the #PoetryByMe community will be unable to understand the poem. On these grounds alone, most mainstream publishers would refuse to publish an Urdu poem within a self-defined English-speaking community, and it seems unlikely that the poet was simply seeking a larger following. The poem is accompanied by a brief English statement, "Hope someone finds himself in my write-up," suggesting that the author knows English as well as Urdu.¹⁴ But in choosing *not* to translate the poem into English, the poet challenges his or her English-speaking audience to go beyond their comfort zone and experience the poetry of another linguistic group. In short, Lone *inverts* the usual language politics governing translation and literary publication: Rather than being subjected to the politics of publishers, which controls the circulation of world literature, this poem's deliberate interruption of an English-language space allows the poet to reassert his authority and reclaim his identity within a predominantly English space. Hashtags thus offer a more immediate exchange, connecting people from different linguistic groups without translation mediating that interaction.

Conclusion

As we have seen, hashtags are a speech act that calls a community into being. And while the hashtag as a signifying community was first created by Twitter users, hashtags are now employed across social media

were not listed as languages operative for Bing Translator. Alternatively, Bing Translator listed a few languages that were not supported by Twitter (most noticeably Klingon and Klingon pIqaD). In total, the Bing Translator worked for 34 of the languages that were officially supported by Twitter, which is the same number officially supported by Google Translate as of December 2022.

¹³ Translation courtesy of Khalid Lone and Syed Ali Asad Rizvi. Khalid Lone, email message to author, May 7, 2021 and May 26, 2021.

¹⁴ This fact was confirmed through our email correspondence.

¹² The overlap between languages supported by Twitter and those supported by Bing Translator was, however, less than that represented on the Bing Translator site. Even among the nearly fifty language preferences officially supported by Twitter at the time, there were several (including Marathi and Gujarati) that

platforms, from Instagram to Tumblr and YouTube. For instance, on May 17, 2023, a writer on Mastodon who goes by the username “Nonsense Factory” wrote and posted the following Haiku on the platform: “last light of evening / paints angelic clouds orange / jasmine fills the air.” Accompanying this haiku were the hashtags: #Quatrain, #Haiku, #Micropoetry, #Poem, #Poetry, #PoetryCommunity, and #WritingCommunity, among others. The circulation, translation, and politicization of writing communities is thus happening across social media platforms, largely facilitated by the hashtag.

In fact, it is not just literary works that are circulating in this way. Places, events, behavior, movements: these are becoming hashtags that are talked about and signaled in everyday speech, sometimes in irony and sometimes to indicate that a person’s conversation is part of a larger discussion or group. Yet as we have seen, especially when they are applied to literature that is published on social media, hashtags ask us to reexamine the textures and implications of these literary texts by analyzing the hashtag communities in which the text is implicated and the text’s relationship to those communities. Thus, while we may not be in charge of how powerful symbols circulate and where they manifest themselves, we can nonetheless recognize that the hashtag has become a well-known, global symbol that facilitates the creation of international and even trans-linguistic communities, and these communities are in turn altering the national power structures that have traditionally governed the circulation of information and of literary texts. In this way, Twitter literature—and the new forms of social media literature developing in its wake—is participating in a new form of literature that is truly global in scope.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Appendix 1: Graphs & Images



Image 1. The first use of the hashtag on Twitter.



Image 2. Twitter poem by Rick Dove.



Image 3. Twitter poem by Michael H. Lester.

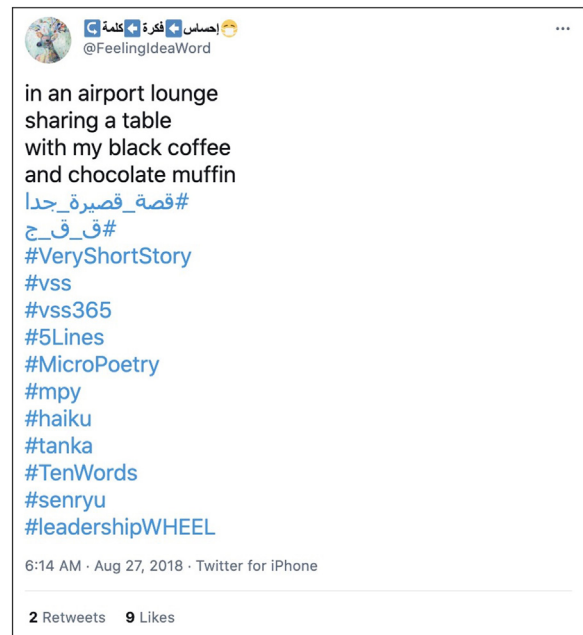


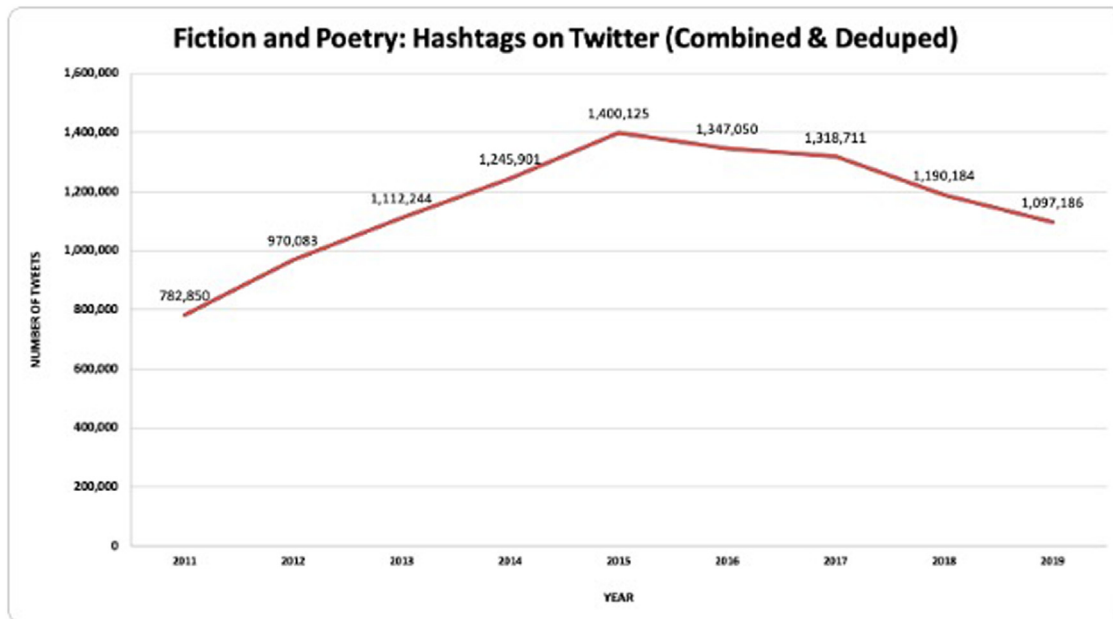
Image 4. Twitter poem by user @FeelingIdeaWord.



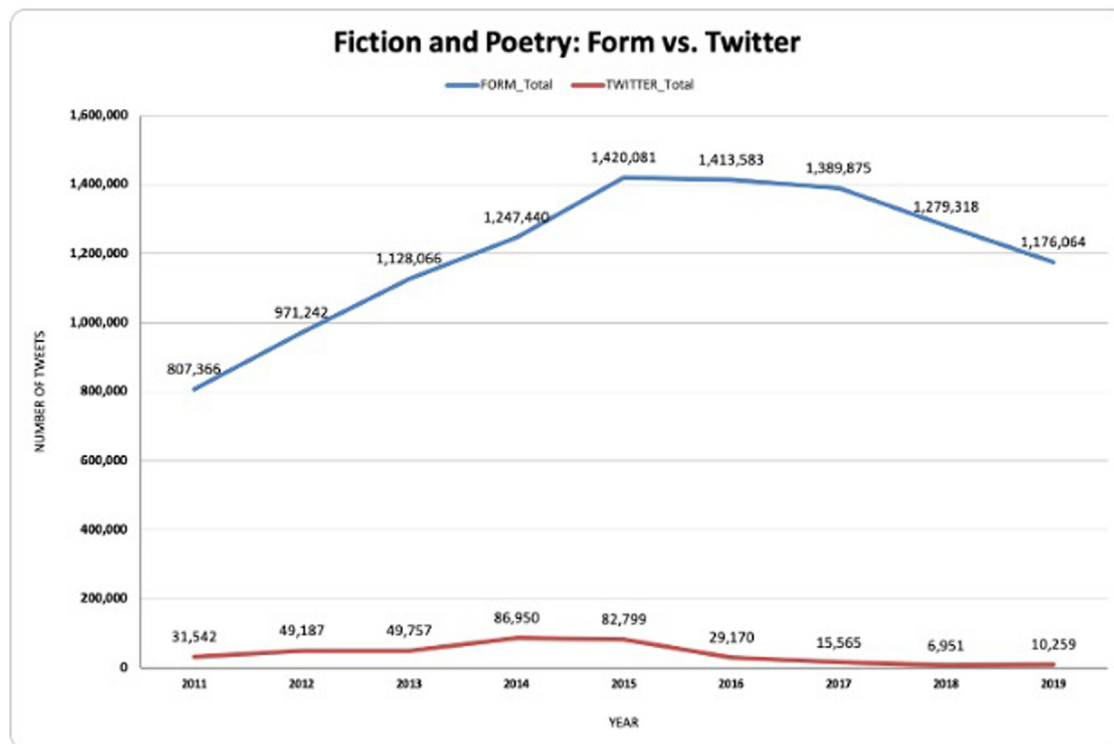
Image 5. Twitter poem by M. A. Istvan Jr.



Image 6. Twitter poem by Khalid Lone.



Graph 1. Number of tweets that use hashtags to indicate fictional or poetic genre. Hashtags used to collect this data are: #3lines, #5lines, #flashfiction, #gogyoshi, #haiku, #microfiction, #micropoem, #micropoetry, #microtales, #nanotaes, #poetryontwitter, #poetweet, #shortstories, #shortstory, #tanka, #twifi, #twitfic, #twitfiction, #twitlit, #twitterature, #twitterfiction, #twitterpoem, #twitterstory, #veryshortstory, and #vss.



Graph 2. Number of tweets that use hashtags to reference literary and poetic form versus those that reference Twitter as a writing practice. Hashtags related to writing were divided into two groups: those that explicitly reference Twitter ("TWITTER_Total") and those that merely reference the literary form (such as #micropoetry or #tanka) ("FORM_Total"). The hashtags grouped under FORM are #3lines, #5lines, #flashfiction, #gogyoshi, #haiku, #microfiction, #micropoem, #micropoetry, #microtales, #nanotales, #shortstories, #shortstory, #tanka, #veryshortstory, and #vss; those grouped under TWITTER are #poetryontwitter, #poetweet, #twifi, #twitfic, #twitfiction, #twitlit, #twitterature, #twitterfiction, #twitterpoem, and #twitterstory.

References

- Aciman, A., and Rensin, E. 2009. *Twitterature: The World's Greatest Books Retold Through Twitter*. London: Penguin.
- Al Sharaqi, Laila, and Abbasi, Irum. 2016. "Twitter Fiction: A New Creative Literary Landscape". *Advances in Language and Literary Studies* 7 (4): 16–19.
- Beller, Thomas. 2013. "The Ongoing Story: Twitter and Writing". *The New Yorker*, June 18, 2013. <https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/the-ongoing-story-twitter-and-writing>.
- Bonifacic, Igor. 2022. "European Union Limits Targeted Advertising and Content Algorithms under New Law". *Engadget*, April 23, 2022. <https://www.engadget.com/eu-agreement-digital-services-act-172049636.html>.
- Brandom, Russell. 2014. "Teju Cole Orchestrates His Twitter Followers into a Collective Short Story". *The Verge*, January 8, 2014. <https://www.theverge.com/2014/1/8/5288234/teju-cole-orchestrates-his-twitter-followers-into-a-collective-short>.
- Brock, Andre. 2012. "From the Blackhand Side: Twitter as a Cultural Conversation". *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media* 56 (4): 529–549.
- Chakelian, Anosh. 2014. "#History: The Journey and Many Faces of the Hash Symbol". *The New Statesman*, May 4, 2014. <https://www.newstatesman.com/sci-tech/2014/06/history-journey-and-many-faces-hash-symbol>.
- Chemi, Eric. 2015. "Is Your Social Media Choice for the Rich or Poor?" *CNBC*, April 21, 2015. <http://www.cnbc.com/2015/04/21/where-the-rich-kids-are-on-social-media.html>.
- Cole, Teju. 2013. "Seven Short Stories about Drones". *The New Inquiry*, January 14, 2013. <https://thenewinquiry.com/blog/seven-short-stories-about-drones/>.
- Conde Nast. 2016. "The New Yorker – Circulation Demographics."
- Conger, Kate. 2023. "How Elon Musk Is Changing the Twitter Experience". *The New York Times*, April 7, 2023. <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/04/07/technology/elon-musk-twitter-changes.html#:~:text=Musk%20has%20made%20to%20Twitter's,might%20not%20be%20interested%20in>.
- Davis, Wes. 2023. "Twitter Is Being Rebranded as X". *The Verge*, July 23, 2023. <https://www.theverge.com/2023/7/23/23804629/twitters-rebrand-to-x-may-actually-be-happening-soon>.
- Dawson, Paul, and Mäkelä, Maria. 2020. "The Story Logic of Social Media: Co-Construction and Emergent Narrative Authority". *Style* 54 (1): 21–35.
- Dimock, Wai Chee. 2008. *Through Other Continents*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Djordjevic, Milos. 2021. "25 Insightful New York Times Readership Statistics [The 2021 Edition]". *Letter.ly*. March 14, 2021. <https://letter.ly/new-york-times-readership-statistics/>.
- Edmonds, Rick. 2018. "How the New Yorker Found Its Digital Groove". *Poynter*, Oct. 9, 2018. <https://www.poynter.org/business-work/2018/how-the-new-yorker-found-its-digital-groove/>.
- Egan, Jennifer. 2012. "Black Box". *The New Yorker*, May 28, 2012. <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2012/06/04/black-box>.
- Fish, Stanley. 1980. "Is There a Text in This Class?" *The Authority of Interpretive Communities*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Flood, Alison. 2014. "Novelist David Mitchell Publishes New Short Story on Twitter". *The Guardian*, July 14, 2014. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/jul/14/david-mitchell-publishes-short-story-twitter>.
- Gunelius, Susan. 2018. "How to Find Twitter Hashtags to Amplify Your Tweets". *Lifewire*, May 15, 2018. <https://www.lifewire.com/twitter-hashtags-amplify-tweets-3476507>.
- Harvey, Colin B. 2014. "A Taxonomy of Transmedia Storytelling". In *Storyworlds across Media*, edited by Marie-Laure Ryan, and Jan-Noël Thon, 278–294. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- Howard-Sukhil, Christian. *Project TwitLit*. <https://twitlit.github.io/>.
- Hungerford, Amy. 2016. *Making Literature Now*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Hutchinson, Andrew. 2022. "A Look at All the Changes Implemented by Elon Musk at Twitter in his Time as Chief Twit". *Social Media Today*, Dec. 19, 2022. <https://www.socialmediatoday.com/news/How-Twitter-Has-Changed-Under-Elon-Musk/639041/>.
- Jensen, Signe Kjær, Mousavi, Nafiseh, and Tornborg, Emma. 2022. "Intermediality and Social Media". In *Intermedial Studies*, edited by Jørgen Bruhn, and Beate Schirmacher, 282–308. New York: Routledge.
- Johnson, Miriam J. 2021. *Books and Social Media: How the Digital Age Is Shaping the Printed Word*. New York: Taylor & Francis.
- Kulshrestha, Juhi, Kooti, Farshad, Nikraves, Ashkan, and Gummadi, Krishna P. 2012. In *Geographic Dissection of the Twitter Network*, 202–209. Association for the Advancement of Artificial Intelligence.
- Lam, Vivian. 2021. "Fans on Twitter Are Creating a New Kind of Story You've Never Seen Before". *Electronic Literature*, May 28, 2021. <https://electricliterature.com/fans-on-twitter-are-creating-a-new-kind-of-story-youve-never-seen-before/>.
- Lerman, Rachel. 2022. "Musk Plans Twitter Check Mark Feature Again, This Time with More Colors". *The Washington Post*, November 25, 2022. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2022/11/25/musk-twitter-verified-check-marks/>.
- Levey, Nick. 2016. "Post-Press Literature: Self-Published Authors in the Literary Field". *Post* 45. February 3, 2016. <https://post45.org/2016/02/post-press-literature-self-published-authors-in-the-literary-field-3/>.
- Losh, Elizabeth. 2020. *Hashtag*. New York: Bloomsbury.
- Martin, Michel, and Cole, Teju. 2014. "Teju Cole Writes a Story a Tweet at a Time". *NPR*, January 16, 2014. <http://www.npr.org/2014/01/16/262473432/forget-the-new-yorker-storyteller-turns-to-twitter>.
- Mitchell, David. 2015. *Slade House*. New York: Random House.

- Muir, Caitlin. 2018. "44 Essential Twitter Hashtags Every Author Should Know". *Author Media*, <https://www.authormedia.com/44-essential-twitter-hashtags-every-author-should-know/>.
- Murray, Simone. 2015. "Charting the Digital Literary Sphere". *Contemporary Literature* 56 (2): 311–339.
- Murray, Simone. 2018. *The Digital Literary Sphere: Reading, Writing, and Selling Books in the Internet Era*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Newberry, Christina. 2021. "36 Twitter Stats All Marketers Need to Know in 2021". *Hootsuite*, February 3, 2021. <https://blog.hootsuite.com/twitter-statistics/>.
- Notopoulos, Katie. 2023. "Twitter Is Shedding Users, Most of Them Democrats, A New Survey Shows". *BuzzFeed News*, January 31, 2023. <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/katienotopoulos/twitter-users-down-democrats-elon-musk>.
- NPR. 2014. "Teju Cole Writes a Story a Tweet at a Time." January 16, 2024. <https://www.npr.org/2014/01/16/262473432/forget-the-new-yorker-storyteller-turns-to-twitter>.
- Owen, Stephen. 2014. "Stepping Forward and Back: Issues and Possibilities for 'World' Poetry". In *World Literature in Theory*, edited by David Damrosch, 249–263. Hoboken, NJ: Modern Philology.
- Page, Ruth. 2012. *Stories and Social Media: Identities and Interaction*. London: Routledge.
- Pearce, Matt. 2011. "Death by Twitter". *The New Inquiry*, October 13, 2011. <https://thenewinquiry.com/death-by-twitter/>.
- Piredda, Francesca, Ciana, Mariana, and Venditti, Simona. 2015. "Social Media Fiction: Designing Stories for Community Engagement". In *Interactive Storytelling*, edited by Henrik Schoenau-Fog, Luis Emilio Bruni, Sandy Louchart, and Sarune Baceviciute, 309–320. New York: Springer.
- Rahul. 2019. "Twitter PWA Ditches Bing Translator in Favor of Google Translator". *MSPoweruser*, March 22, 2019. <https://mspoweruser.com/twitter-pwa-ditches-bing-translator-in-favor-of-google-translator/>.
- Rizer, Addison. 2022. "What Is Twitterature? An Introduction to the Genre". *Book Riot*, June 23, 2022. <https://bookriot.com/twitterature/>.
- Ryan, Marie-Laure. 2004. "Will New Media Produce New Narratives?" In *In Narrative Across Media*, edited by Marie-Laure Ryan, 337–359. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- Stokel-Walker, Chris. 2022. "Twitter May Have Lost More Than a Million Users Since Elon Musk Took Over". *MIT Technology Review*, November 3, 2022. <https://www.technologyreview.com/2022/11/03/1062752/twitter-may-have-lost-more-than-a-million-users-since-elon-musk-took-over/>.
- Tabbi, Joseph. 2010. "Electronic Literature as World Literature; or, The Universality of Writing under Constraint". *Poetics Today* 31 (1): 17–50.
- Thomas, Bronwen. 2014. "140 Characters in Search of a Story: Twitterfiction as an Emerging Narrative Form". In *Analyzing Digital Fiction*, edited by Alice Bell, Astrid Ensslin, and Hans Kristian Rustad, 94–108. New York: Routledge.
- Thomas, Bronwen. 2020. *Literature and Social Media*. London: Routledge.
- Thomas, Bronwen. 2021. "The #bookstagram: Distributed Reading in the Social Media Age". *Language Sciences* 84: 1–10.
- Toolan, Michael. 2010. "Electronic Multimodal Narratives and Literary Form". In *New Perspectives on Narrative and Multimodality*, edited by Ruth Page, 127–141. New York: Routledge.
- Tufekci, Zeynep. 2017. *Twitter and Tear Gas: The Power and Fragility of Networked Protest*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Twitter Translation Center. 2013. "Start Translating Twitter Today" (archived page). Captured on the Internet Archive's *Wayback Machine* on June 6, 2013. <https://web.archive.org/web/20130606055948/https://translate.twitter.com/welcome>.
- Twitter Developer Platform. 2022. "Supported Languages and Browsers." Accessed December 30, 2022. <https://developer.twitter.com/en/docs/twitter-for-websites/supported-languages>.
- Vadde, Aarthi. 2017. "Amateur Creativity: Contemporary Literature and the Digital Publishing Scene". *New Literary History* 48 (1): 27–51.
- Xinhuanet.com. 2017. "BRICS Leads Science, Technology Innovation in Developing Countries." August 29, 2017. http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-08/29/c_136565671.htm.
- Zhang, Sarah. 2013. "Teju Cole on the 'Empathy Gap' and Tweeting Drone Strikes". *Mother Jones*, March 6, 2013. <https://www.motherjones.com/media/2013/03/teju-cole-interview-twitter-drones-small-fates/>.
- Zipfel, Frank. 2014. "Fiction Across Media: Toward a Transmedial Concept of Fictionality". In *Storyworlds across Media*, edited by Marie-Laure Ryan, and Jan-Noël Thon, 103–125. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

Christian Howard-Sukhil Specializing in contemporary world literature, Christian Howard-Sukhil received her PhD in English from the University of Virginia in 2019. She then served as the Digital Humanities Postdoctoral Fellow at Bucknell University from 2019–2021. She has published articles at the intersection of contemporary global literature and the digital humanities in journals including *Contemporary Literature* and *The Digital Humanities Quarterly*. Additionally, she has presented her research at numerous international conferences. She is currently a J.D. candidate at University of California, Berkeley, School of Law.