



Technology and Narrative Transformation in Contemporary English Fiction

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Abstract

Digital technology is becoming an increasingly important motif in modern English literature and a structural force shaping narratives. In light of the post-digital age, this article examines how two well-known authors, Tom McCarthy and Jennifer Egan, reorganize classic plot components. The analysis employs McCarthy's *Satin Island* (2015) and Egan's *The Candy House* (2022) to demonstrate how technological paradigms, such as data aggregation and algorithmic logic, generate new story elements, including distributed points of view, fractured temporality, and the breakdown of causal plot sequences. The authors fail to portray technology as an afterthought; instead, they weave its syntactic and architectural principles into the very fabric of their story. According to Hayles (2012), the computing environment changes the capacities and symbolic significance of narratives. The study uses a comparative narratological paradigm to identify similarities and contrasts in tone and epistemology, including strategies like database-driven narration and untrustworthy digital awareness. According to the results, narratives in English fiction written in the twenty-first century undergo more adaptive mutation due to technological development than a rejection of old patterns. As we reach the age of generative AI, the implications for reading habits and the future of the novel are examined in the conclusion.

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1. Introduction

There has been a notable convergence of tale structure and technological innovation in the early 21st century. Fiction must reflect new entities like cellphones and social media platforms due to the digital revolution, which also calls for a reassessment of how stories are created, shared, and experienced. This study claims that by incorporating computational logics into narrative structure, modern English literature, especially in its post-digital form, redefines narrative aspects like time, viewpoint, and plot causality. Novelists Tom McCarthy and Jennifer Egan explain how the concepts of computer processing, externalized memory, and data aggregation both open up new narrative possibilities and expose the shortcomings of traditional storytelling. Post-digital fiction refers to print novels released after the normalization of digital culture that integrate computer logic as a foundational principle (Hayles, 2012, p. 189)^[8]. Post-digital fiction is characterized by its analogue nature, constructing realms derived from databases, surveillance, and fragmentation (Ryan, 2006, p. 97)^[17]; in contrast, digital storytelling necessitates electronic screens and interactivity.

Two examples of this category are McCarthy's *Satin Island* (2015) and Egan's *The Candy House* (2022)^[3]. Literary studies have predominantly concentrated on the thematic exploration of technology in fiction, neglecting the impact of technological pressure on narrative form itself (Pressman, 2014, pp. 8–10)^[14]. This study adds to a comparative narratological analysis that considers how technology affects narrative structure. Two research questions serve as the foundation for this analysis: what digital storytelling

strategies do Egan and McCarthy employ, and how do their approaches differ? The comparative analysis reveals that although both utilize fragmentation, distributed consciousness, and non-linear temporality, Egan retains vestiges of humanist connections to empathy and memory (Egan, 2022, pp. 112–115)^[3], whereas McCarthy pursues a more radical anti-chronological aesthetic (McCarthy, 2015, pp. 47–48).

2. Theoretical Framework

This study draws on three theoretical frameworks: post-digital theory, contemporary narratology, and the concept of unnatural storytelling. When combined, these frameworks give the analytical vocabulary required to investigate how Egan and McCarthy change tale structure in response to technological pressures.

2.1. The Post-Digital Condition

The phrase "post-digital" necessitates a precise elucidation. According to Pressman (2014)^[14], the post-digital does not signify the cessation of digital technology, but rather that digital media are no longer perceived as innovative or transformative (8). From a literary analysis perspective, the word indicates that contemporary fiction is composed within a digital realm rather than from an external viewpoint. Pressman (2014)^[14] asserts that the impact of computer culture on cognition and perception has been examined through contemporary experimental techniques, including fragmentation, stream of consciousness, and non-linear temporality in the digital era (10-12).

2.2. Narrative Theory in the Digital Age

To comprehend new media forms, contemporary narrative theory has transcended conventional structuralism. Dinnen and Warhol (2018)^[1] assert that the discipline must consider the functioning of narratives within the context of digital media and algorithmic capitalism (2). This transition necessitates the examination of both print fiction that employs digital logics without being digital and digital narratives as distinct subjects. Consequently, digital and post-digital narratives exhibit significant differences.

Hypertext fiction, interactive storytelling, and videogame narratives are examples of digital tales that run on electronic screens and often require reader interaction (Ryan, 2006, p. 97)^[17]. In contrast, post-digital fiction adopts computational concepts such as modularity, recursion, and database logic as structural elements, while remaining a print artefact (Hayles, 2012, p. 189)^[8]. Regardless of whether a narrative is presented on paper or on a screen, Hayles (2012)^[8] contends that the computational environment alters what narratives can do and how they indicate (12).

2.3. Unnatural and Transmedial Narratology

Unnatural narratology ideas are used in this paper to show how post-digital narrative tactics can make things seem less familiar. Ensslin (2022)^[4] says that story structures that aren't natural—those that aren't possible or are confusing by normal imitation standards—can be found in all kinds of texts (18). However, in post-digital fiction, unnatural story elements emphasize the physical and situated nature of reading while also challenging realist assumptions (Ensslin, 2022, p. 21)^[4]. According to Egan and McCarthy, unnatural ways of telling stories include multiple points of view that can't be tied to a single mind, time structures that make it impossible to

reconstruct time, and plot logics that derive from databases rather than causal chains. These tactics don't just depict a digital world; they also create a post-digital way of knowing, in which stories are used to question technology.

2.4. Integrating the Frameworks

This paper presents an analytical framework that integrates these three theoretical streams. Pressman's (2014)^[14] post-digital theory provides the cultural and historical background: although writing from within a digital society, neither Egan nor McCarthy saw digital development as unquestionably progressive (8–10). They attain this critical perspective through structure rather than through explicit commentary; narrative theory provides the formal vocabulary to articulate it (Dinnen & Warhol, 2018, p. 2; Ryan, 2006, p. 97)^[1, 17]. According to Ensslin (2022)^[4], one way to spot instances of post-digital fiction that go beyond classical narrative mimesis and make the reader feel uneasy about their connection to technology is through the use of unnatural narratology. Egan and McCarthy both live in a post-digital world, but they use different storytelling approaches, according to this framework's analysis of the two case studies. Within her fractured, multi-perspectival frameworks, Egan preserves the humanist ties to memory and empathy. McCarthy's anti-chronological aesthetic is more extreme; in it, story pattern takes the place of plot altogether (18-22).

3. Case Study One: Jennifer Egan – *The Candy House*

A notable incursion in post-digital fiction is Jennifer Egan's *The Candy House* (2022), a companion book to her Pulitzer Prize-winning *A Visit from the Goon Squad* (2010). In the near-future society depicted in the novel, technology entrepreneur Bix Bouton creates "Own Your Unconscious," a service that enables users to access other people's memories, externalize their own memories onto a device known as the Consciousness Cube, and share them anonymously in a crowdsourced repository known as the Collective Consciousness (Egan, 2022, p. 27)^[3]. This main idea serves as a narrative engine that radically restructures the novel's plot while also providing speculative material.

3.1. Narrative Fragmentation as Digital Logic

The Candy House's fractured, multi-perspectival structure is the most obvious narrative change. Instead of using a straight chronology, the book is organized into interconnected chapters that serve as separate short stories, each focused on a distinct character and set in a period between the 1960s and the 2030s (Resnick 2022, para. 8)^[15]. Instead of using traditional literary architecture, Egan divides the book into three sections called "Build," "Break," and "Drop" (Egan, 2022, pp.–vii)^[3]. The computational idea of modularity—discrete, interchangeable elements that may be reassembled without losing meaning—is embodied in this structural decision (Hayles, 2012, p.189)^[8]. Egan's modular design treats story episodes as database entries that readers assemble into patterns, in contrast to the traditional novelistic structure, which presumes chronological consistency and causal progression.

The narrative voice and genre are also fragmented. First-person and third-person narration, an epistolary chapter written entirely of emails, a chapter written as a direct-message relay, and an espionage thriller condensed into tweets are just a few of the astounding variety of techniques that Egan uses (Resnick, 2022, para. 9)^[15]. A dissertation on

authenticity, written in a hybrid academic-personal style, is also included in the book (Egan, 2022, p. 197). The diversity of styles fulfils a post-digital purpose by reflecting the varied information environments of modern digital life, where users continuously switch between text messages, social media, email, and streaming media. In contrast to the concept-album organization of its predecessor, Egan has described the novel's structure as taking from "electronic dance music's more disjunctive approach" (para. 11), as noted by Resnick (2022)^[15].

3.2. Memory as Database

The novel's concern with externalized memory also finds immediate expression in its narrative method. In a world where characters can upload, save, retrieve, and alter their memories, the classic literary representation of consciousness as a continuous inner stream is no longer possible. The story suggests that memory is changed from a story—the version of events we tell ourselves—into a searchable archive—a collection of unrelated data without any underlying chronological or causal structure. This modification supports the assertion put out by Hayles (2012)^[8] that computer environments impact the capabilities and information conveyed by narratives (12). Egan literalizes this database logic in a chapter titled "What the Forest Remembers," when the narrator, Charlie, interrupts her third-person account of events in 1965 to ask: "How can I possibly know all this?" (Egan, 2022, 89). She explains, slowly: she has accessed the memories of her dead father, through the Collective Consciousness. Thus, the narrator's omniscience is retroactively justified, not by authorial convention but by the novel's own technological premise. Resnick (2022)^[15] notes that Egan has said that she designed the Consciousness Cube so that her narrator could legitimately know everything about everyone (para. 12). This gesture exemplifies the tendency of post-digital fiction to transform the technological base into a narrative affordance: the technology is not merely present in the story, but permits a particular style of storytelling that would otherwise be unimaginable or unjustifiable.

3.3. Distributed Consciousness and Polyphony

With the access of numerous characters to each other's memories, individual subjectivities dissolve into one another. Egan realizes this breakdown in what one would call a distributed point of view: periods where the narrative voice seems to emanate from a collective rather than an individual awareness (Egan 2022, 150-152). The novel's numerous jumps between persons, often within the same chapter, suggest that awareness is not proprietary but networked, moving through the social graph as data through a server. This polyphony is not a stylistic flourish; it is the narrative embodiment of a post-digital epistemology in which the self is no longer a fixed, bounded entity, but a node in a network of shared knowledge (pp. 267-269).

3.4. Residual Humanism

Even with these major changes in how the story is told, Egan doesn't completely abandon standard story structures. The book says over and over that telling a story is better than just gathering facts. A character near the end of the book thinks, "Knowing everything is too much like knowing nothing; without a story, it's all just information"

(Egan, 2022, pp. 321). This line, which Freedenberg (2022)^[6] and Resnick (2022)^[15] identify as the novel's main idea, reveals Egan's humanitarianism. Post-digital fragmentation and database logic are used in the book only to show that these structures are not enough—that people need narrative coherence to make sense of their experiences.

This makes Egan different from post-digital writers like Tom McCarthy, who are more radical. Egan believes in humanity, memory, and the idea that everyone's life has a way of turning out for the better. She makes her characters likeable, even those involved in surveillance capitalism. For example, Bix Bouton is "an earnest father" with "comically naive" utopian views (Resnick, 2022, para. 14)^[15]. There are many reviews that say the tone of the book is still "bright, upbeat" and extraordinarily moving (Resnick, 2022, para. 15)^[15]. In Egan's post-digital fiction, changing the story strengthens the human, not breaks it down.

4. Case Study Two: Tom McCarthy – *Satin Island*

The Candy House by Jennifer Egan is a more conventionally structured tale than Tom McCarthy's (2015) Man Booker Prize shortlisted *Satin Island*. While Egan holds on to his humanist roots in storytelling and empathy, McCarthy follows what critics call an anti-chronological, pattern-driven aesthetic, methodically removing novelistic staples like plot, character growth, and emotional resonance (Hogan, 2015, para.4)^[9]. The unidentified consultant hired the novel's narrator, U., a "corporate anthropologist" who aims to capture the spirit of the modern era through a document formally referred to as "the Great Report" (McCarthy, 2015, p. 17). Neither the Great Report nor the novel itself ever reaches a satisfying conclusion; instead, they conclude in a tense, unresolved halt.

4.1. The Database as Narrative Principle

McCarthy's *Satin Island* views the entire phenomenal universe as a database waiting for pattern detection, whereas Egan's book views memory as a database. U. spends his days creating dossiers on a variety of topics, including the buffering circle on a computer screen, oil spills, skydiver deaths, rollerblading processions, traffic bottlenecks in Africa, and cargo cults (McCarthy, 2015, pp. 45–67). According to Draney, J. M. Coetzee's *Diary of a Bad Year* and *Satin Island* both grapple with a fundamental aesthetic issue: how to narrate or describe a world that already diagrams and archives itself in dizzying detail via computational media (408). McCarthy's approach is to replicate the logic of this information overload at the level of form rather than imposing narrative order. Instead of being divided into conventional chapters, the book is divided into numbered sections, each serving as a distinct unit of observation that defies incorporation into a more comprehensive causal sequence.

According to Hayles (2012)^[8], this structural decision represents the transition from narrative to database as a prevailing cultural form (189). A database arranges data as a collection of distinct items that can be sorted, filtered, and retrieved in any order, in contrast to a narrative, which arranges data chronologically and causally. *Satin Island* reads more like a compilation of entries from U.'s anthropological field notes than a narrative; these records hint at patterns but don't cohere into a clear explanation.

4.2. The Erosion of Plot and Character

Plot (a causally related sequence of events) and character (a stable psychological entity whose desires drive the action) underpin traditional narrative. McCarthy continually degrades both. U.'s colleague's illness, a string of strange skydiver deaths, and his connection with Madison may form the basis of a more conventional story, but U. seems uninterested in them all (Kirkus Reviews, 2015, para.3). According to Hogan (2015)^[11,9], U. "is not a man who suffers ordinary opinions gladly" (para. 5). Importantly, he lacks emotional engagement. In response to his colleague's cancer death, he uses the same flat, analytical tone as oil spills and traffic congestion.

The aesthetic strategy is deliberate, not a sign of authorial incompetence. The novel's narrator reveals his methodological beliefs. The novel begins with U. asking: "What do I do? Anthropologist. Identifying, prying out, and holding up, kicking and writhing, symbolic operations lurking on the habitual and the banal—that's my racket" (McCarthy, 2015, p. 9). Anthropologists dehumanize people by reducing them to patterns and emotions to facts. Rather than being a character, the storyteller is a network node.

4.3. The Parachutist Motif: Meaning Deferred

Failure to open parachutes kills parachutists in the novel. These occurrences appear in U.'s compulsive news collection and become a bad allegory for meaning. The parachutist falls toward the ground, expecting impact, but only the fall and suspension are described. O'Gara (2015)^[13] says, "U. ping-pongs between dead parachutists, BP oil spills, *Staten Island*, cancer, YouTube buffering in search of a logical conclusion—any logical conclusion" (para. 4. Parachutists symbolize the novel's structure: the constant postponing of resolution, when patterns eventually make sense.

The novel is named after *Staten Island*, which you never visit. A journey not travelled, a destination not reached—this sums up the novel's anti-narrative logic. finishes the narrative in suspension after deciding "not to bother going to Satin Island" (McCarthy, 2015, p. 183). He is left "in some kind of formal arrangement whose logic escaped [him]" (O'Gara, 2015, para. 5)^[13]. In this way, the novel rejects the most fundamental promise of traditional narrative: that the trip will finish and that the initial questions will be answered.

4.4. The Critique of Interpretation

Satin Island serves as a continuous critique of the interpretative process inherent in literary criticism. U. is a professional interpreter—an anthropologist compensated to identify patterns and derive meaning—yet his endeavors provide no results. The Great Report stays unwritten, not due to a lack of material, but rather an excess thereof: an unending regression of data, each element indicating another pattern, which subsequently directs to yet another. Draney (2022)^[2] contends that the work illustrates a reading of the narrators of *Diary* and *Satin Island* encounter a stalemate upon realizing that the cybernetic universe has rendered their critical methods obsolete" (p. 420).

The problem is not that meaning is hidden, but rather that the idea of "hidden meaning" may become outdated in a time when information is fully accessible. The genre of the story is affected by this impasse. "What if the novel's genre can no longer produce a critical counterpoint to the alienated realm of informational control?" is a major question Draney (2022)^[2] poses in relation to McCarthy's writing. (page 422). *Satin*

Island is a testament to its own failure to achieve the synthesis or resolution that is usually associated with the novel genre; rather than directly addressing this issue, it enacts it.

4.5. Post-Digital Aesthetics as Ethical Withdrawal

McCarthy's artistic choices' ethical implications should also be considered. Critics say the novel lacks "human interest" (Hogan 2015, para. 3)^[9] and its characters are "cameos" rather than personalities. This is a provocation, not a mistake. After poststructuralism and digital networks decenter the human subject, the book asks: What are the implications of writing fiction in a post-human context? McCarthy proposes a story that rejects empathy, as shown in the Los Angeles Times, where Madison, U.'s partner, refuses to be "anthropological." She responds to U.'s analysis: "If possessing complete knowledge of an individual constituted the pinnacle of human interaction, we would merely transport memory sticks and connect them upon meeting" (McCarthy, 2015, p. 141). This meta-commentary shows the cruelty of the anthropological perspective—its reduction of people to statistical points—while trapping the novel in it. McCarthy only clarifies this difficulty, not solves it.

5. Comparative Discussion

As the above case studies illustrate, Jennifer Egan and Tom McCarthy re-imagined the form of their stories for their reflections on the post-digital environment. This section presents a brief overview of these findings by highlighting methodological similarities, emphasizing important differences, and discussing the implications of these similarities and differences for the range of possible narrative transformations in an era in which digital technologies are no longer dominant.

5.1. Shared Strategies: Modularity, Fragmentation, and Database Logic

Egan and McCarthy opt for modular, fragmented structures rather than linear, causally driven storylines. McCarthy organizes *Satin Island* as a collection of anthropological field notes segmented into numbered sections, whereas Egan structures *The Candy House* into distinct, interconnected chapters that serve as independent short stories (Egan, 2022, pp. v–vii; McCarthy, 2015, pp. 45–67). In both cases, the organizational approach resembles a database rather than a conventional narrative structure.

Database logic, which is the arrangement of unique objects that can be accessed in any order, has become a widespread cultural construct that influences how narratives function, according to Hayles (2012, p. 189)^[8]. This fragmentation also addresses character and consciousness. *Satin Island's* U. is more of a recording device or a node in a network than a psychologically complex character, while Egan frequently switches between characters, frequently within a single chapter. Both novels have what could be described as scattered points of view.

The steady, uninterrupted awareness that is the standard for classical realist literature is not provided by either book. Rather, subjectivity is shown as distributed, networked, and somewhat externalized in both pieces. Additionally, both writers use narrative strategies that reflect certain characteristics of digital media. Egan's style repertoire includes compressed tweets, emails, and direct messages (Resnick, 2022, para. 9)^[15]. As an illustration of suspended temporality, McCarthy's narrator obsesses over the buffering

circle on a computer screen (McCarthy, 2015, p. 112). In each instance, the digital artefact is integrated into the novel's formal framework rather than merely thematized.

5.2. Key Divergence: The Humanist Attachment

Despite these commonalities, the two authors' perspectives on conventional narrative affordances couldn't be more different. In this study, we refer to Egan's continued adherence to what we term "residual humanist attachments" (Egan, 2022, p. 321). These attachments include trust in empathy, the importance of memory as an identity construct, and the restorative potential of narrative. Her use of post-digital fragmentation in the novel is limited to implying that such structures are ultimately inadequate in the absence of narrative coherence. One character says it plainly at the end of *The Candy House*: "Knowing everything is too much like knowing nothing; without a story, it's all just information" (Egan, 2022, p. 321)^[3]. In this way, the book serves as a safeguard for the story against data overload. In contrast, McCarthy does not provide any such justification.

Plot, character growth, and emotional resolution are the consolation prizes that *Satin Island* consistently rejects. We never see the parachutists land, and the Great Report never comes to a close (McCarthy, 2015, pp. 45-67). As a response to the post-digital condition, McCarthy takes a different approach from Egan, who reaffirms humanist principles. McCarthy's novel, in fact, becomes a record of its own failure to attain traditional narrative closure.

5.3. Divergence in Tone and Epistemological Stance

This discrepancy is also evident in the tone. Reviewers consistently characterize Egan's novel as "bright, upbeat" (Resnick, 2022, para. 15)^[15] and extraordinarily moving. McCarthy's work is characterized as "exacting and peculiarly beautiful," but it is also intentionally devoid of human interest. Egan's surveillance-capitalist protagonist, Bix Bouton, is sympathetically depicted as "an earnest father" motivated by "comically naive" utopian beliefs (Resnick, 2022, para. 14)^[15]. However, McCarthy rejects such humanizing gestures. U. is not a character that we are encouraged to sympathize with or comprehend; rather, he is a component of the system he delineates.

This tonal distinction is indicative of a more profound epistemological divergence. Ultimately, Egan's novel demonstrates that meaning can be discovered and that stories can provide a respite from the confusion of information. McCarthy's novel raises the issue of whether "meaning" is a coherent category in the post-digital era. The issue for McCarthy's narrator, as Draney (2022)^[2] notes, is not that meaning is concealed, but rather that the concept of covert meaning may have become obsolete (420). In this regard, McCarthy's post-digital fiction is more consistent and, arguably, more radical.

5.4. What the Divergence Reveals

Post-digital narrative transition is not a uniform occurrence, but rather a contentious domain, as demonstrated by the comparison between McCarthy and Egan. Data saturation, externalized memory, and algorithmic society are all technological constraints that both writers are addressing, albeit in different ways (Draney, 2022, p. 422). In order to make the book more suitable to digital logics, Egan maintains the genre's humanist ethos while reconfiguring its conventional narrative structures. McCarthy claims that the

concept of core is obsolete. Although revised for the digital era, the book is still clearly a novel, and Egan is a moderate reformer. According to the book, McCarthy stands for a more radical and abolitionist viewpoint, which is a record of its own demise. Both writers argue that technology should be considered an integral part of the narrative structure, rather than an afterthought.

6. Implications for Contemporary Fiction

The preceding analysis of Egan and McCarthy has implications that extend beyond the understanding of two novels. This part investigates what their post-digital storytelling strategies entail for the future of the novel as a genre, reading habits in the digital age, and literary criticism as a discipline.

6.1. The Future of the Novel Form

Despite the advent of new media such as the printing press, telegraph, cinema, and television, books have managed to adapt to these new media instead of going extinct. The digital revolution, on the other hand, presents a new challenge entirely. Digital media poses a threat to alter the cognitive and narrative habits that form the basis of the novel, in contrast to older forms of media that fought for readers' attention. Both the capabilities of narratives and the ways in which readers engage with them are impacted by the computing environment, as stated by Hayles (2012, 189)^[8].

Two perspectives on this shift are embodied by Egan and McCarthy. Incorporating digital forms (emails, tweets, and direct messages) into the book's stylistic repertoire, Egan changes it while keeping traditional narrative pleasures like character identification and emotional conclusion (Resnick, 2022, para. 15)^[15]. In contrast, McCarthy strips the novel of its pleasures in his adaptation, making the literature seem like a record of the novel's own demise (Draney, 2022, p. 422)^[2]. Two schools of thought are likely to emerge in the novel in the age after digital media: one will seek to reassure readers with humanist ideals like empathy and story coherence, adapted to the digital age; and the other will conduct more extreme experiments to determine if these ideals are even feasible or desirable in the modern world.

6.2. Implications for Reading Practices

New expectations are placed on readers by post-digital fiction. Conventional storytelling teaches viewers to anticipate a logical progression, a strict chronology, and consistent character psychology. The modular, multi-perspective structure of Egan's *The Candy House* both partially fulfils and concurrently frustrates these expectations. Instead of passively following a straight path, readers will need to cognitively arrange the novel's dispersed episodes into patterns, much like navigating a database. There is no fixed pattern to assemble in McCarthy's *Satin Island*; instead, there is an indefinite delay of pattern completion. The narrator of the book ping-pongs between dead parachutists, BP oil spills, *Staten Island*, cancer, YouTube buffering in search of a logical conclusion—any logical conclusion (para. 4), as O'Gara (2015)^[13] points out. Readers hoping for a satisfying finish will be let down. Literary education and ideas of reading are affected by this change. Texts are believed to have stable meanings that skilled readers can retrieve through appropriate interpretive techniques. This assumption is made by traditional reading models such as Fish's interpretive communities and Iser's

implied reader (Iser, 1980, p. 303). This presumption is challenged by post-digital fiction, especially in McCarthy's style. When a text consistently fails to provide a salvageable meaning, reading becomes more of a witnessing of the impossibility of interpretation than an act of interpretation itself.

6.3. Implications for Literary Criticism

The rise of post-digital fiction also poses a threat to literary criticism as a discipline. Is the genre of the novel no longer able to produce a critical antithesis to the alienated world of informatic control? Draney (2022, 422) asks. The question has methodological implications. If the novel has become complicit rather than critical of digital society, then criticism that seeks to identify the novel's critical or resistant roles may be chasing a phantom. Alternatively, if the novel is not a critique but a symptom of the digital condition, as McCarthy's work arguably shows, then the duty of criticism switches from detecting resistance to exposing complicity. Pressman (2014) ^[14] similarly argues that modernist experimental approaches have been reappropriated in the digital age to portray the cognitive impacts of computer culture (pp. 10-12). This argues that literary criticism needs to learn to understand formal experimentation, not as artistic autonomy, but as a historically placed response to technical progress.

6.4. Implications for Authorship in the Age of AI

A final implication concerns the future of authorship itself. Both Egan and McCarthy write fiction that internalizes computational logic, but both remain firmly within the paradigm of human authorship. The emergence of generative artificial intelligence—large language models capable of producing coherent prose—raises questions that neither novelist directly addresses. If a machine can produce text that is stylistically indistinguishable from human-authored fiction, what becomes of the category of the author? The post-digital condition that Egan and McCarthy describe—data saturation, algorithmic pattern recognition, the erosion of stable subjectivity—may accelerate toward a limit case in which the human author becomes one node among many in a network of text generation. The concepts developed in this paper—post-digital narrative, database logic, distributed consciousness—may serve as preliminary tools for that future analysis.

7. Conclusion

This paper has examined how Jennifer Egan and Tom McCarthy transform narrative structure in response to post-digital conditions. Both authors embed computational principles such as modularity, database logic, and distributed consciousness into the architecture of their fiction. However, they diverge fundamentally in their attitude toward traditional narrative. Egan retains humanist attachments to empathy and storytelling, ultimately affirming the value of narrative against information overload. McCarthy pursues a more radical path, abandoning plot and character development to question whether traditional narrative remains possible under informatic control.

By comparing them, we can see that post-digital story transformation is not a single thing, but a contested area that includes both Egan's reformist adaptation and McCarthy's more abolitionist style. Changes in how people read, new expectations for literary criticism, and the rise of generative AI as a possible authorial agent are all things that could affect the future of the book. The book will live on after the digital revolution, but it's unclear whether it will do so in a humanist or post-humanist way.

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