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Text By Mus

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In literary scholar and philosopher William Egginton's 2016 book "The Man Who Invented Fiction: How Cervantes Ushered in the Modern World", he writes, "in the early seventeenth century, a crippled, graying, almost toothless veteran of Spain's wars against the Ottoman Empire published a book... it was the story of a poor nobleman, his brain addled from reading too many books of chivalry, who deludes himself that he is a knight errant and sets off on hilarious adventures... that book, *Don Quixote*, went on to sell more copies than any other book beside the Bible, making its author, Miguel de Cervantes, the single most-read author in human history... Cervantes did more than just publish a bestseller, though... he invented a way of writing... this book is about how Cervantes came to create what we now call fiction, and how fiction changed the world."¹

Today, fiction is in flux. The Internet is ushering fiction writers in faster than readers realize. Literary fiction is being outed in favor of mass-market genre fiction. Imagine for a moment the paperback novels at the airport terminals. The internet is bursting with those same kinds of paperback novels. With an increasingly digital environment comes the intense need for instant gratification. The supply has far surpassed the demand. Demand is now playing catch up at the expense of writing. This leaves readers the dilemma of having to work harder to find and read good writing, that is to say, writing that is not for the internet. This should not be the case. Good writing must exist on the Internet for writing's sake. Writers can not allow the Internet to determine the quality of creative writing from here on out. Writing has been backed into a corner

¹ Egginton, William. *The man who invented fiction: How Cervantes ushered in The Modern World*. Bloomsbury Publishing USA, 2016.

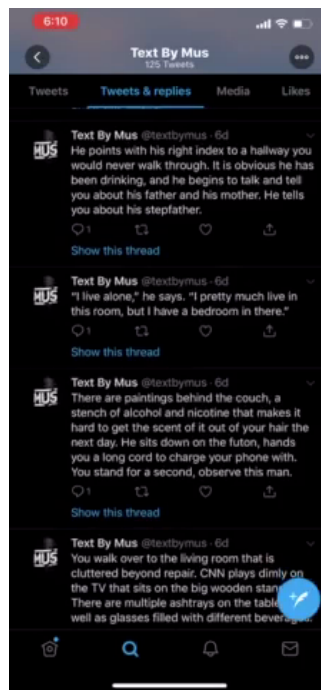


[Watch](#)

and yet it must adapt to the changing environment. In a less than ideal pagescape, writers must fight against the Internet to combat this adverse change.

This is why I have created a Twitter bot to generate interactive thread-based creative writing in the form of short stories called Text By Mus as my interactive media project in the graduate level course Writing for the Web PRWR 6850 instructed by Dr. Sergio Figueiredo. The account features “choose your own adventure” stories written in the literary fiction style. I would like to use the Twitter bot to combat the mass-market production of what is called literature in lieu of digital fiction being just as good as classical, all-time great fiction. This project presents a software platform, Twitter, designed and implemented to support the creation of digital

publishing organizations (DPOs) and to mediate the collaborative interaction among participants of the digital publishing process. I posit that as digital publications become the norm, the text making up these digital publications must retain literary merit and feeling out of necessity. My major goal is to support the entire digital publishing process, which may vary from DPO to DPO. Distinctive features of the design include facilities for users to define the structure, participants and genres handled by DPOs, as well as tools to support the processes involved in authoring, reviewing, publishing and using digital materials. Twitter is being used to generate a choose your own adventure in a thread-based narrative. The following text is titled Russian Blues and it serves as the base model for the Twitter bot Text By Mus.



Click play to watch

The dust from the woodworking your father likes to do settles into your shared garage and activates your wheezing and coughing.

Do you stay or leave?

If you leave

You go inside the house where your mother is talking and cooking with her sisters while the TV is on in the background. They all seem in good spirits. They immediately register your presence by giving you things to do. You start to chop onions, and before you know it, an apron is tied around your waist by an aunt... a little too tight for your liking. Nevertheless, you continue chopping onions, dicing tomatoes, and doing prep for the dinner that would be had later on tonight.

If you stay

One glance his way and you can tell he has been sitting here all night and worked himself into the morning, which is when you rose to come see what all the fuss was about. There is an old stereo playing classic blues in the corner, and the one window in the garage is open, where all kinds of birds occasionally flutter into for water and sunflower seeds.

Tucking his greying beard under his chin with his left hand as he ate potato salad, his eyes fell on yours first, then the chess board that hadn't been touched in over two years. It, too, was coated in cobwebs, drenched in the sunlight that poured in through the glass of the window. The two of you would play chess often when you were growing up, especially in the summertime when you were out of school and he enjoyed a 3-month long vacation from his job at the public high-school. But he's retired since, and the youthful days of woodworking and playing chess are coming back to him in awesome waves. You've watched him build tables,

chairs, and benches and yet playing chess seemed to work the inner mechanisms of his mind the most.

“I was helping your uncle out last night,” he says.

You don’t say anything. You take a seat, watch him count up wood, do math in his head.

“He was operating a bag check-point outside the stadium... you know... for people who bring large bags to arena concerts. I’m squinting, and I squint some more... and a young man approaches the table with a blue and black Nike backpack. He starts asking me questions. I tell him the same thing I tell everybody. Then he asks me if I can do it for \$3.”

By now he’s collected the chess board, has assembled the moving pieces, pausing briefly here and there to blow the dust off.

“I already wanted to punch him in the nose then. But I hid my grimace, and smiled at this young man — he was younger than you. I told him I needed \$5 from everybody.”

Your father makes the first move, shifts the rook up two paces.

“So he asked me — is the bag going to be safe?”

He starts to laugh. That laugh turns into more a guffaw as the winds blow behind your back and the leaves start to fall from branches to asphalt. The guffaw snowballs into a full on uproarious hoot that you don’t doubt the neighbors became privy to.

“Your generation needs to learn how to connect and trust one another. Of course the damn bag would have safe, you know what I mean? We’re bonded and insured. We’re not standing out there in the cold protecting your bags because we’ll let somebody steal them. There were police officers surrounding the place.”

You listen, because that's what you do best with Pop. He puts you in check-mate and announced he was going to go inside and join your mother.

Do you follow him or go home?

If you follow him

You watch him put his belongings where they, well, belong and together you walk into the home he and your mother had lived in for over 20 years. You watch a movie with your parents and fall asleep.

If you go home

You say goodbye to to your dad and start to walk back to your apartment, just around the corner and down the way. It's the closest you've lived to your parents, and you had lived far from them before. On the other side of the country. In another country. In another hemisphere. But now, you are within as close proximity without living on top of them.

When you arrive home, you find your girlfriend Aziza. She stands in the doorway to your bedroom; arms crossed, back straight. You worry she may be spending too much time in the boardroom wearing pantsuits.

Before she makes eyes with you and makes for the door, she rips into you. She is upset about something, upset about your decision to get a cat without consulting her. A beautiful Russian Blue cat. You are to pick him up as per the word of the current owner, a creative director of an ad agency who would be moving to Chicago and could no longer provide for the feline in question. Its name is Marley, and Marley loves chasing laser pointers and flashlight beams around the walls. You connected with the owner on a relatively domestic social media

network called Nextdoor, where neighbors help neighbors. But Aziza isn't sure anymore, what is, what could have been. She never knew.

Do you follow her or let her go?

If you follow her

You follow her to watch her climb into an Uber and flip you the bird. You walk back inside your apartment and get high and watch Spanglish.

If you let her go

You walk to your friend Maj Khorasi's loft, note how the halted rain clings to the night just like the tears hang on her face.

But she's gone now, and you can't wonder where she went. You want to eat, and you want to eat at Khorasi's. When you arrive, he is standing outside tending to his caged pet rabbit in the garage. He is wearing a black t-shirt, black sweatpants, black sneakers. The gold chain around his neck catches the moon and glistens. Aziza can't realize what she was up to was wrong or menacing. You force one last thought out about what had just occurred when you meet Khorasi and tell him.

He pulls at his mustache while he speaks. He gives me that look that says *look, I get it, you're going through it, we all are, et's talk about something, anything else* look that gets passed down from where the CEO takes a piss to the tiniest cubicle on the trading floor in the company building where we work. He not so much lifts one of the cigarettes in his soft pack as much as yanks it, lights it before you take it in your mechanical pencils of fingers.

You are both silent, smoking. He suddenly relays a story about a girl he had met months ago. Mother insisted the poor guy date Indian Hindu women. Maj the dog was to become Maj

the Hindustani over night — the traits don't crossover. He met her at a Chick-Fil-A for breakfast — who doesn't like chicken biscuits, he reasons — and the first rule breaker is the fact she takes pulp with her orange juice.

When you ask him what it has to do with your predicament, he hits the cigarette hard and ashes it out before explaining it had very little to do with what happened between Aziza and you, but everything to do with what happens between women and men: what is tiny to him and you can be gigantic to she and her.

There were notes Aziza and you read to each other, letters that you wrote on acid to each other in college.

I, Yunis Killuminati, only have eyes for you. I want to be your husband, and I want to be your best friend. I want to show you I love you. I want to surprise you with the little things. I want to leave the frivolous topics behind and let you know how much I appreciate you. So I will leave tiny Hershey's kisses where you reach for the aux cord in the morning. So you can start your mornings with the two kisses. Your sister's boyfriend proposed to her on her birthday. What a selfish asshole. If it were up to me, I will propose to you on the most random day. So that you have another special day in the year. And I can continue to date you, my wife, my life partner, my bride.

I, Aziza Mahdi, remember the day we met like it was a film. It all happened in slow motion. I promise to love you at your worst. I promise to be your muse, the light of your eyes, as long as I'm your rock. I want you to be my husband, be my life partner, be my man. I fell in love with your voice, so deep, and cozy. I want to exist there. I promise to write you love letters on your birthday. I want you to know my love for you is unlike anything else I have felt, or could

ever feel, in this lifetime. It keeps me up at night, and keeps me wishing for another tomorrow with you. I love you, Yunis.

But those were the good days. You and Aziza had bad days too.

“I cheated on you. Plenty of times. Some nights it felt good, it was no longer just thrilling, it was life-affirming. There were nights I came home and fell asleep right away. You know why. I fucked the surgeon at the hospital, the devilishly handsome one. I fucked guys I met at the gym. I never fucked Francis, but I would think about it sometimes, and just tease him, partly out of boredom, partly out of spite, mostly out of boredom,” she told me once, discussing it as coldly as she could while blinking back tears. The water ducts didn’t synchronize with the tone of her voice.

Aziza and you used to pass time staring at the city’s skyline from the park, ate when we felt hungry. Sometimes you went whole days without saying anything. You made funny faces at each other. You made ugly faces at each other. Talking about the past felt stupid. You had ruin on our hands.

Maj brings hunger up as a conversation point. Aziza calls and asks to meet at a diner.

Do you stay and eat or meet Aziza at a diner?

If you stay and eat

Maj and you eat his mother’s home-cooked biryani, have some ice cold Cokes poured into frosted glasses, watch sports until it’s time for him to go to bed and time for you to leave.

If you meet Aziza at a diner

The storm the night Aziza calls you topples over the coast, makes the drive almost undoable. But it’s you, and it’s her, and she doesn’t know what’s going on. It’s just an innocent

text. She's ready to go to sleep. It's been one hell of a wedding. But she can't resist. She makes your hotline bling. That's probably how she'll play it off to the slumber-slumped lovebirds Pawel and Miritha, drunk, laid on top and over each other like a one being.

Aziza has nerve. The only thing stopping you from getting there earlier is the torrential downpour. Aziza must miss LA tonight. She used to like living by the water.

She didn't know better when she first moved. She's moved a lot. Just the fact the beach is sparking clean, and the sounds of the pristine waves crashing atop one another comfortably reaching your ears was enough for a young, yet to be jaded Aziza. Now, all LA ever is can best be described as gray. The petrichor doesn't do enough to offset the dreary nature of this city.

You've arrived at the diner she's told you to meet her at. You don't know what time of the night it is. You park your car with precision by the side of the building, exit slowly and make your way into the rustic, dated joint. Just like enunciating a single word reduces its meaning to existential mush, when you lets the letters linger on your lips, your condition's akin to deliria. *Ahhhhh-zeeee-zaaaaaaa. Aziz-uhhhhhh.*

"I'll stop wearing black when they make a darker color," Aziza always says. It's the unassuming black, the elegance of the hue.

"Hey."

She looks up and see you. She'll never tell you, but you have a knack for arriving as softly and quietly as her own heart's harmonies. You wave at an employee who comes over, gives you a hug. That's the type of person you are. You take a seat. It's a diner, alright. Dingy lights, a jukebox in the corner. Smokers cut figures of social butterflies on sidewalks in the

summer. Your hands find hers on the table but she won't make eye contact just yet. She has to take an intense beauty in slowly. Your perfected smile. Your long eyelashes. Girls would kill for them. She stares right above them, at the big forehead. The small space between your eyes. Your hair's tied up in a lush, black bun.

"You surprised me by being around," you say. "Try not to do that, alright?"

"I thought you liked surprises."

"Whose wedding?"

"Miritha."

"Finally."

You both laugh. You both know the soon-to-be wife's been through a lot.

"You're so smart. You can do anything you want. I don't understand why you're doing this," she says it like she means it — eyes full, wrists dainty, bent slightly.

She knew it was coming. An unsuspecting man only travels where there's dread. Is it true? Is the artist such an enigma he is born for black? Or nature? Her patience grows thinner by raindrop. Soon, she will abandon her heart and stroll into the night, seeking a calamitous passion. Love comes and goes in waves. She is aware of this, reads Nayyirah Waheed. Yet, even her aged heart pines for drowned memories. Her demure voice echoes in the diner. You finds solace in the fact your communication has the power to transcend tongues. The eyes say it all. Yet, your vocal chords strike the ones around her heart, and she succumbs. You suffice non-verbal language enough for now.

"Give this to her."

Aziza shakes her head. A single silent tear streams down her cheek, brings her palms to her thighs.

“I’m not touching that.”

“She’s my daughter. I can give her things too.”

“She’s doing fine. We’re doing fine.”

“Whadd’yall have?”

For a second, you forget where you are. So full of immediacy, the unmatched desire to satisfy each other on a level that makes sense. They turn and order tea, black. The scene unfolds in silence: sipping tea, stealing glances, playing on your phones, ordering more coffee, doodling on notebook paper. It’s only when the diner is set to close, and the ruckus and commotion from the chairs and tables awaken a kindred spirit within her, stir her soul to spare the solace of the night.

“Remember the night before your 21st?”

Aziza looks up. Her black coffee’s finished, and she shifts the cup towards the window before answering. “We stayed up all night, on the phone.”

“Like some teenagers.”

“It was cute. And impractical.”

“We kept saying bye but nobody wanted to hang up. We wanted to see who would spot the Sun first.”

Now Aziza’s excited.

Her eyes are all moons — luminous, capturing from a long distance, and wholly alluring up close.

“You said it that night, for the first time.”

“I know.”

“You made me feel so safe.”

“I know.”

“I’ll take the bag.”

You look at her and this time, you’re the one who’s grateful. You’re the one who knows a future with Aziza wholly depends on your own behavior, a twisted existence bent on illegitimacy. Now, you know you’ll do anything to keep that spark alive. Even if that’s forcing her into your own darkness.

“I’m going outside.”

Aziza leaves the booth slowly, like she’s calculating her motions. Maybe she is. She lets her energy direct her to the swinging diner bar. Head on a swivel, heart on a swing, she knows the thing she misses the most is those phone calls. Those days when meeting and missing someone like me was all she thought about. *When would she meet her lover? When it was too late?*

She lights a cigarette. She’s grateful you don’t follow her to the sidewalk. You recount a time she flies from Virginia, after visiting her cousin. You’re on your way back from London. She has vivid dreams of you — playing tourist, drinking with the locals, indulging in literary escapades in the sunlight. She FaceTimes you at odd hours, sacrificing your own sleep.

One night, you speak with all the tenderness found in nature and nurture.

“My father hit my mother. I saw it. I was helpless.”

She listens.

“I’ve never told anybody that before.”

She believes you, trusts you with all her heart. She senses and feels: her tears stain her bedsheets, her tears run down the back of her palm.

And then, in the airport, you reunited. They didn’t have much time. So, they sat. Shared earphones. A right for you and a left for Aziza.

She’s come back inside the diner and beckons for you to come with her.

You watch Aziza unlock the door to her apartment, and the first thing she does is check on your daughter. You have tunnel vision when it comes to your daughter. She has your eyes. The second thing Aziza does is sit at her desktop, bask in the bright glow of the Internet. She opens up Microsoft Word. Starts typing. You makes drinks for her, roll joints for her.

I write love letters to him, because, he is so lovely.

I put the words together carefully,

*different — from the way I speak. He writes love letters to me,
and my heart gives out.*

It’s almost melancholy.

You sip, puff, puff, sip, sip, sip, puff, sip.

“I sleep with a nightlight on,” she says.

Aziza points to the lone source of illumination, resting peacefully in the corner of the room.

—

The color of the tennis courts in your neighborhood match the billowing trees, and the door has been left upon by whoever had been using the park before. It, too, is green and you

walk through it to thwack the lime tennis balls against the maroon brick wall. Again and again. The song playing in your Air Pods sounds better here.

Your iPhone pings and you see a message via the Nextdoor app that more or less invited you over. Eager to fill the void Aziza had left in your life with this gorgeous being, you quickly pack up and walk to the garage where you keep a parked car as if yellow and grey gravel isn't prone to veer off into the never-ending. You put your things inside the trunk and grab the pack of smokes that lay to the left.

Lighting a cigarette as you walk down the street, inhaling tobacco and chemicals in the brisk weather Georgia has seen in a while, your mind drifts towards the possibilities surrounding yourself and this cat. It is truly a luminous cat and if it weren't for the Internet, let alone the app, you never would have had the chance to come to know of its existence.

When you reach the destination, you find yourself in front of the building where there were visitor parking spaces. Lacking the unit number, you fish your phone out of your pocket and let out an audible groan. The device has died, and you know no one in this building just next to yours. You are in the right place, but at the wrong time.

You start to walk down the sidewalk, hoping to come across somebody. *400...* I thought... *400...* you walk into the parking garage running alongside the building the address had taken you to. Standing by the callbox, while residents filtered through their mail by unlocking and locking the keys, you are about to buzz in when someone buzzes the door and opens it, lets you in after them.

You take the elevator to the 4th floor. This is it. 400 Emerald Parkway NE. You're reminded of Emerald City Bagels, the warm, toasted breakfast foods you'd fuel up on every

once in a while before headed into work. You are also reminded of emeralds in themselves and close your eyes for a moment to indulge yourself in the rubbed and shined glow that comes from emeralds.

Once the elevator comes to a halt, the doors open. Five people you don't know enter the elevator once you exit. Not one of them looks at you. They look young, excited, dressed colorfully. You stand there for a moment and only began to move your side profile once the doors closed.

409... 408... 407... 406... 405... 404... 403... 402... 401... ah, 400. The door itself was plain as it could be compared to the others down the hallway. Some people had already began decorating for Christmas, while others had Thanksgiving ornaments hanging from their doors and on the floor around their mats. When you knock on the door, you are kind of surprised how rough the woman answering it looked. She looks sleepy, brushes past you as a man follows.

He is dressed in a red flannel with the sleeves rolled up twice. It is tucked into his Levi jeans. His brown boots give him an inch of height but he is still shorter than you. He looks to be about 50 and he reeks of cigarettes. Between his stubby fingers on his left hand is a cigarette near its end. He let it ash while he is looking at you.

“Hello,” he says.

“Uh — hi.”

“Can I help you?”

“Well, actually, yes. You see, I'm looking for a cat. His name's Marley. Like Bob Marley. We spoke on Nextdoor about this...”

“Nextdoor?”

“You know, the app.”

“You’re looking for a cat...” the man echoes, like he is trying to find a deeper meaning in why you are knocking on his door at 10:45 PM.

You go to show him your phone and only remember it died once all four eyes in the situation are fixated on a black screen.

“I don’t suppose I’m at the right place,” you say.

“Well... what’s your friend’s name with the cat? I may know them.”

“He’s not my — Mohsin. It’s Mohsin...” you say.

“Mohsin. Nope. Lived here for about eight years now, never met a Mohsin. But, hey, you want to come in? Charge your phone?”

Do you go in and or go home?

You go home

You realize this is a foolish mission. You thank the man for his time and go home. You get high and watch Spanglish again.

You go in

You give him another glance-over. The lines in his face are so deep and wrinkled, you could place the lint that lived in your pockets in them. Your hands too are calloused, reddish — but his eyes tell a different story. You walk into the apartment, and he closes and locks the door behind me.

“You’re not going to kill me, are you?”

“No, I’m not going to kill you. What type of phone do you have?”

“I have an iPhone.”

You walk over to the living room that is cluttered beyond repair. CNN plays dimly on the TV that sits on the big wooden stand. There are multiple ashtrays on the table, as well as glasses filled with different beverages. There are paintings behind the couch, a stench of alcohol and nicotine that makes it hard to get the scent of it out of your hair the next day. He sits down on the futon, hands you a long cord to charge your phone with. You stand for a second, observe this man who just let you into his home.

“I live alone,” he says. “I pretty much live in this room, but I have a bedroom in there.”

He points with his right index to a hallway you would never walk through. It is obvious he has been drinking, and he begins to talk and tell you about his father and his mother. He tells you about his stepfather.

“Your cat’s not here... but you knocked on the right door. You and I — we were never *supposed* to cross paths.”

Your phone has powered on by now and you start to access the Nextdoor app. It strikes you that the person on the other line is not responding now, and how utterly ridiculous the scene before you looks. You, a 20 something brown man dressed in athleisure seated next to him, a drunken 50 something white man dressed like a farmer.

“Do you want a beer?”

What the hell, you think. You’ll take one. He retrieves two cans of IPA from the fridge and sits back down. He talks about being poor all his life, rejecting his stepfather’s advice to pursue architecture, and tells a story.

“A long time ago, I lived in a house with four roommates. One of the roommates was smoking crack with a woman he brought home. Suddenly, she turns to me, and she says ‘for \$50, we can go back in the back room right now’.”

He looks at you and shakes his head side to side.

“I was just so uncomfortable. All I recall is saying no over and over, and retreating to my bed. Women are sirens.”



Logo

In Janet Murray's "Inventing The Medium: Introduction: A Cultural Approach to Interaction Design", Murray makes it clear that there is a precedence for physical media, but not as much of, if at all, a precedence for digital media. She writes, "the building blocks of design are built while the specific artifact is being designed as well... digital designers inherit too many building blocks that are quite familiar and practical, but suited to legacy media formats, and in conflict with one another... even though there is a well-developed design protocol for user need analysis and user testing of industrial products, users cannot tell us how to resolve problems that require new design strategies..."² This properly sets up Text By Mus, and sparked the idea for Twitter to be the platform. Signing up to become a developer on Twitter is what it takes to get going. Since Twitter is so text-friendly, this was a win-win. Murray's work indirectly inspires the engagement with the platform in question.

In Michael Rudin's "From Hemingway to Twitterature: The short and shorter of it", it is written that "with every status update and tweet, the millions of individuals on social-networking sites are more than staying connected—they are reading, writing, editing, distilling, and interpreting the written word more than any generation in history... in doing so, they are helping develop Fiction 2.0: a fascinating marriage of character-count restrictions and the network effect that has created a new category of short-form content and narrative experimentation... this paper explores five of these new fiction prototypes—twitterature, nanofiction, crowd-sourced narratives, infographics, and \$0.00 stories..."³ The idea of Twitterature stood out to me here.

² Murray, Janet H. *Inventing the medium: principles of interaction design as a cultural practice*. Mit Press, 2011.

³ Rudin, Michael. "From Hemingway to Twitterature: The short and shorter of it." *Journal of Electronic Publishing* 14.2 (2011)

Twitterature seemed like the perfect term to describe what it was I wanted to accomplish. It also occurred to me how Hemingway was being seen as the standard albeit much ahead of his time. I found it interesting while the coining of the term Twitterature is new, Hemingway may still be the first to write something that could earn the title.

In Carla Raguseo's "Twitter fiction: Social networking and microfiction in 140 characters", notable Twitter fiction projects are mentioned by name and handle. It is written "Twitter fiction can provide learners with a rich language experience in easily digestible fragments... it challenges them both as readers and as writers to attempt and explore multiple meanings and to develop academic skills such as synthesizing and paraphrasing while fostering structural and semantic awareness in playful experimentation... furthermore, microstories, misquotes and historical tweets are rich in cultural and literary references, and as such present a wide range of learning opportunities... they can help achieve the aim of teaching English through content that is dynamic, relevant and exciting for students..."⁴ The idea of using the Twitter bots to teach English did not occur to me but I find it beneficial and just another reason as to improving the quality of the writing found on the Internet.

In "A Screeed for Digital Fiction", an international group of digital fiction scholars proposes a platform of critical principles, seeking to build the foundation for a truly digital approach to literary study. The authors deliberate on the platforms provided amongst the digital literary canon. They go on to define certain buzzwords that have their place in digital fiction. They determine what emerged from these definitions and assets that used to be merely physical

⁴ Raguseo, Carla. "Twitter fiction: Social networking and microfiction in 140 characters." *TESL-EJ. The electronic journal for English as a second language* 4 (2010)

before they transitioned into being digital assets. In this part of the annotation, we discover that there is a strict definition for digital fiction that guides us. There is intercommunication and the art of conversation to bring in another perspective to bolster the writing.

In William Nelles' "Microfiction: What makes a very short story very short?", The author William Nelles dives into definition-based writing on the short story. He is a professor of English in Massachusetts and he wrote this essay I found on Academia. Nelles identifies six traits that separate flash fiction from short stories. Action is tangible and intense. Characters are anonymous, less important than action, circumstance, situation. Setting is recognizable, familiar, and practically non-existent. The story takes place anywhere. Any room, any house, any park, any bar. Time is short and concise. The plot may draw from known works like fairy tales, Bible stories, Shakespeare, or pop culture. Closure is definitive and resolute. This rundown of determining factors helped Russian Blues come to life.

In Joachim Vlieghe, Kelly Page, Kris Rutten's "Twitter, the most brilliant tough love editor you'll ever have", screenshots, texts and other multimodal elements do an excellent job of breaking down longstanding literary traditions. This reaffirmed my decision to stick to adjusting to the Internet without sacrificing literary integrity. Today's creative writers are immersed in a multiplicative, multimodal, digital universe. It requires "multiliteracies", all in a constantly and rapidly evolving technological environment, which are not yet fundamentally integrated into the basic literacy skills entrenched in school learning. It is written of young and people students that "they read Jennifer Egan's short fiction and lament they'll never be good enough to publish in

The New Yorker... they read her same work as a Twitter novel and think, hey, I can do that, and it will be fun.”⁵ This reassured me Twitter was the right platform to use for this project.

In Massimo Lollini’s “E-philology and Twitterature”, an original use of Twitter to interpret and rewrite the poems of Francesco Petrarca's *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta* was highlighted. The writers stated “we believe that our digital time should develop new and more functional ways of addressing literary texts but at the same time we are convinced that the "burdensome duty of hours spent reading" cannot be eliminated.”⁶ This conviction is what gives the bot life, and what adds fuel to the fire. That unwillingness to bend over backwards for the digital pagescape is what keeps Text By Mus going.

In Hannah Osborne’s “The Ai-Novel: Ai no seikatsu and Its Challenge to the Japanese Literary Establishment”, Osborne shows “via Tomi Suzuki's formative theory on the I-novel, how her debut novella, Ai no seikatsu (Love life, 1967) can be read as both invoking and subverting what had previously been seen as intrinsically masculine genre.”⁷ Osborne employs a literary theory by Tomi Suzuki to make sense of a fictional text. This gives the decisions I am making in my writing more context in which to work with in order to reach those far east Asian corners of the globe.

In Alsyon Morris and Tim Kelly’s article “The Virtues of the Virtual: Creative Writing Online”, they state “the virtues of online teaching and learning are discussed, alongside digital

⁵ In Joachim Vlieghe, Kelly Page, Kris Rutten’s “Twitter, the most brilliant tough love editor you’ll ever have”.

⁶ Lollini, Massimo, and Rebecca Rosenberg. "E-philology and Twitterature." *Humanist Studies & the Digital Age* 4.1 (2015): 116-163.

⁷ Osborne, Hannah. "The Ai-Novel: Ai no seikatsu and Its Challenge to the Japanese Literary Establishment." *Japanese Language and Literature* 53.1 (2019): 95-121.

projects engaged in by the creative writing team as part of the teaching and research programme at Coventry University... their primary focus is on the multi-faceted dimensions of student blogging, but they also looked at online teaching delivery and student engagement.”⁸

In conclusion, this project attempts to accomplish a revival of literary fiction by giving into the changes the Internet has bestowed upon the craft and practice of writing fiction. Fiction writers have two choices: write better than ever on digital platforms or let fiction die. It is my sincere wish the majority choose the former option. Text By Mus operates in the contexts of digital and social environments.

I made the material choices to write about people of color in this story. Yunis is a Pakistani American, along with Aziza, Pawel, Miritha. The man towards the end is Caucasian American. Maj is Indian American. I made the technological choice to include an iOS app in the story.

I ended up pursuing this plan as opposed to the others I came up with because this provided just enough content to push the story forward without being too long. It was the perfect first vehicle for Text By Mus to operate via.

I developed skills in writing magically realistic and literary text. I can write scenes better now, and I have a better understanding of how to write short fiction at a measured pace. My thinking about writing has grown in that I believe that there is good writing on the internet. The problem is the inaccessibility of good writing on the Internet. I believe what an editor told me, when he said I need to read good writing. That is, writing that is not for the internet. He

⁸ Morris, Alyson, and Tim Kelly. "The Virtues of the Virtual: Creative Writing Online." *Education (NAWE)* 64 (2014): 53-59.

essentially said all writing for the Internet is bad. I want to change that.

Original, self-produced, non-alphabetic media elements

[GIF #1](#)

[GIF #2](#)

[GIF #3](#)

[GIF #4](#)

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Artist Statement

My work for the past 14 years has used fiction, which has a profound impact on our contemporary culture and our imaginative capacities today, to tell stories that entertain and help people. One of the greatest writers I ever met told me the best fiction is a lie that tells the truth. I think about that all the time. In the current climate where many feel defeated by the collapsing of our ecosystems, the slipping away of professionalism in American workplaces, and confusion at side hustles and passions becoming full time jobs, I, as a creative writer, am continually searching for the right pairing of words that makes those anxieties disappear, even if just for a moment. Most people are feeling the same things writers are feeling, but they could never articulate it as well, let alone put it into the words. In my varied mediums: print, digital, multimodal, social, etc., writing has always been just the text and I.

My fictional stories range from from taking place in universities to gymnasiums to nature to homes to parks to planes and everywhere in between. I have been writing fiction since 2005, which is when I realized I had a gift for the trade. The years spent nurturing the writing have given me moments that have allowed me to cry tears of joy. They have also given me moments where my happy heart plummets into the deepest, darkest parts of my stomach, and wallowing in depression feels so good that I would not stop. I pushed myself hard to gain life experience necessary to write fiction, and ultimately, short stories and novels.

My current effort, “Text By Mus”, is an interactive media project rooted in the platform Twitter and made possible by threads. The first story launched by the software, Russian Blues, is packed with coded language. There is the reference to the country of Russia, and its meddling in the USA elections. There is the word Blues, a form of jazz music, generally more melancholy.

Together the word refers to more than one cat of the Russian Blue variety, but I like to think someone out there takes it to mean a bunch of Russians getting together playing the blues.

There are decisions the protagonist — in this case, you — has to make. Stay with your father or leave him and go home. Eat home cooked food with your friend or go out to see your on-again off-again girlfriend at a diner she asked to meet at. Enter a stranger's apartment or go home at the first sight of stress. The text, in whole, comments on relationships men have with women, and why men always seem to get things wrong.

“Russian Blues” is a multi layered story about Yunis Killuminati and his journey to adopt a cat. He is an American of South Asian descent. He loves his equally American of South Asian descent on-again off-again girlfriend, Aziza Mahdi, fiercely. But he is a flawed character. Out of all the characters in the story, it is him who must grow up the most. That is why he is the one whose shoes the reader must fill, just to grasp a sense of identity and feel.

I write words that evoke emotion and provoke conversation. I am known for my poetic, rhythmic writing style that often incorporates magical realism. I am most proud of my articles in Rolling Stone. I believe what sets me apart from others is my versatility, from poems to fiction to blogs to scripts. I've always loved this quote from Frank Ocean and have kept it close. “If you're a writer, you can write anything... prose, songs, raps, novels, plays, films, laws... take the governor off your gift. Note to self.”

My writing has the power to transcend the novel, especially given the day and age we are living in, but I don't know if I want to give it that power. I want to write responsibly and thoughtfully. I want to write to inspire others to write. I want to write so that my words help others get through their days, and they continue turning the pages until there are no more pages.