

# The Persistence of Romantic Emotion in a Technological World: A Techno-Romantic Study of Nathan Tavares's *Welcome to Forever* (2024)

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## Abstract

*This paper examines the representation of Techno-romanticism in Nathan Tavares's "Welcome to Forever" (2024), focusing on how the novel reconfigures core romantic concepts within a technologically mediated society. The study examines the impact of advanced memory-editing technologies on human relationships, emotional authenticity, and personal identity, highlighting the tension between technological rationality and romantic subjectivity. Through the protagonist's attempt to recover fragmented memories of love, the narrative foregrounds intimacy as a deeply personal yet technologically vulnerable experience. Drawing on romantic ideals that privilege emotion, memory, and inner consciousness, this paper argues that "Welcome to Forever" reconfigures rather than rejects romantic values. Memory, a central romantic element, is presented as both an emotional reservoir and a technological construct, destabilising the notion of a unified, autonomous self. The novel replaces the romantic communion with nature and immersion in digital memoryscapes, giving rise to a digital sublime that evokes awe, uncertainty, and emotional excess comparable to the romantic sublime. The text critiques mechanised control by emphasising emotion and love as forces that resist algorithmic precision. While technology mediates intimacy and recollection, it may not fully regulate human affect. Love functions as a form of resistance, echoing romantic opposition to mechanisation while acknowledging contemporary dependence on technological systems. Through this tension, the novel articulates a form of post-human romance, where emotional bonds persist despite fragmented memory and mediated consciousness. The paper sheds light on how romanticism is not displaced in the digital age but reshaped, evolving into a techno-romantic mode that negotiates humanity, emotion, and identity within advanced technological environments.*

**Keywords:** Techno-Romanticism, Memory, Romantic Subjectivity, Love, Digital Sublime, Identity, Emotion, Post-human Romance

## **Introduction: The Neoromantic Inflexion Point**

The intersection of human emotion and advanced technology has become the primary battleground of twenty-first-century speculative fiction. As we transition into an era defined by algorithmic governance, the fundamental structures of human affect—love, grief, and recollection are being fundamentally re-coded. Nathan Tavares’s *Welcome to Forever* (2024) stands as a seminal primary text in this discourse. It does not merely utilise “cyberpunk” tropes as a backdrop; rather, it engages in a rigorous philosophical inquiry into Techno-romanticism.

To understand the “Techno” in Tavares’s Romanticism, one must first look back to the late eighteenth century. The original romantic movement was a visceral scream against the “Dark Satanic Mills” of the industrial revolution and the cold, disenchanting rationalism of the Enlightenment. Figures like William Blake and Mary Shelley were not anti-science; they were pro-subjectivity. They feared that the mechanisation of the world would lead to the mechanisation of the soul. In the 2020s, we inhabit a second “disenchantment.” The industrial revolution has been superseded by the Digital Revolution, where the “machine” is no longer a steam engine but an invisible algorithm capable of predicting and thus pre-empting human desire. Tavares’s protagonist, Fox, is a “Memory Editor,” a profession that literalizes the romantic poet’s role as the “architect of emotion.” By examining Fox’s internal monologue and his professional ethics, this paper argues that the digital age does not erase romanticism but necessitates its evolution into a mode that can survive within a “Personality Archive.”

## **The Central Tension: Rationality vs. Subjectivity**

The central inquiry of this study focuses on the friction between technological rationality, the logic of efficiency, clean data, and “optimizable” happiness and romantic subjectivity, which champions the messy, unquantifiable “glitch” of the human experience. In *Welcome to Forever*, the company NIL/E represents the pinnacle of Enlightenment rationalism taken to a corporate extreme. They offer a world where trauma can be “edited out” like a typo.

Tavares uses the setting of the “Field of Reeds Centre for Memory Reconstruction” to explore this tension. Through a close reading of Fox’s attempt to recover his husband, Gabe, we see that intimacy is a “technologically vulnerable experience.” In the near future, the act of truly remembering, with all the accompanying pain, becomes the ultimate act of defiance against a system that wants to “smooth out” the human heart for the sake of corporate stability.

## **The Framework of Techno-Romanticism**

Techno-romanticism is a term popularised by scholars like R.L. Rutsky and Richard Coyne to describe the aestheticisation of technology. It is a mode where the computer is no longer viewed as a dry calculating tool, but as a site of mystery, magic, and aesthetic revelation. In traditional Romanticism, the “self” was an autonomous entity in communion with nature. In *Welcome to Forever*, this autonomy is compromised. Fox is an artist whose “canvas” is the human mind.

The novel uses the “Organic Metaphor” (gardening, seeds, thorns) to describe “High Techne” (files, synthetic joy). This linguistic blending proves that the novel “reconfigures rather than rejects” romantic values. The “Organic” and the “Technological” are no longer opposites; they are a single, hybridised reality. If our “inner consciousness” can be rewritten by code, does it lose its value? Tavares suggests the opposite: the very fact that the self is “hackable” makes the struggle to maintain an “authentic” emotion even more profound. We must apply Rutsky’s theory here: he argues that in a techno-romantic world, the “soul” is found not in the function of the machine, but in its non-function—its aesthetics, its beauty, and its ability to evoke awe. Fox’s obsession with Gabe isn’t about data retrieval; it’s about a “Techno-Romantic longing” for a ghost that exists between the lines of the code.

### **Memory: The Destabilised Self**

One of the most significant contributions of *Welcome to Forever* to the genre is its treatment of memory as a “destabilised reservoir.” In Romantic literature, memory was the “sacred repository” of identity. Applying the “memory studies” lens of Jan Assmann, we can categorise the memories in the novel into “communicative” and “cultural.”

- **Communicative Memory** is Fox’s raw, lived experience with Gabe—the smell of his skin, the specific tone of a fight.
- **Cultural Memory** is the “Personality Archive” sold by NIL/E.

The novel explores the “technological intervention” that happens when the latter consumes the former. Tavares uses the metaphor of “The Scar” to represent the persistence of authentic memory.

### **The Fragmentation of the “I”**

In the sections where Fox’s memory is “shredded” by a neuro-terrorist attack, Tavares’s style becomes staccato and recursive. By blending human loss with computer error codes, Tavares demonstrates how “Post-human Romance” is experienced. The “Self” is no longer a “continuous stream of consciousness” (as Wordsworth desired) but a “fragmented data set.” However, the longing to bridge those fragments is a purely romantic impulse. The protagonist is engaging in a “spiritual quest” to recover the truth of his emotional history, proving that even in a world of “fragmented memory,” the “affect” (the feeling) remains the primary anchor of existence.

### **The Corporate Sublime: NIL/E and the Commodification of Affect**

While the Digital Sublime focuses on the aesthetic and psychological impact of data, the corporate sublime addresses the power structures that own that data. In *Welcome to Forever*, the mega-corporation NIL/E represents a late-capitalist evolution of the enlightenment project: the total mapping and monetisation of the human interior. The setting of the “Field of Reeds Centre for Memory Reconstruction” is a masterpiece of architectural irony. Tavares takes the ancient Egyptian concept of a blissful afterlife and rebrands it as a clinical, corporate facility.

The “NIL/E Standard Pearl” serves as a metaphor for the sanitisation of history. NIL/E is attempting to replace “Communicative Memory” (which is messy, traumatic, and individual) with a “Cultural Memory” that is optimised for social stability. By describing the facility as “soothing the amygdala,” Tavares critiques the reduction of human grief to a mere neurological “bug” to be patched. This is the techno-capitalist view of the heart: a series of biological switches that can be flipped to ensure user satisfaction.

### **Khadija Banks and the Aesthetics of Ruin**

The primary antagonist force to NIL/E is not just Fox’s grief, but the revolutionary philosophy of Khadija Banks. As a former pioneer of the technology, she understands that the “purity” of the digital archive is a lie. Her “neuro-terrorist” bombing is an act of Techno-romantic vandalism. In romanticism, the “ruin” (like Tintern Abbey) was a symbol of nature reclaiming human vanity. Khadija’s bombing creates “digital ruins.” When Fox explores these “shredded files,” he is a modern-day wanderer in a landscape of broken code.

This “something truer” is the Romantic Ruin reimaged. The fragmentation of the archive forces the characters to stop relying on the “perfect” corporate record and start relying on their “gut”—the biological residue of love that cannot be digitised. In a world of “Personality Archives,” love is an inefficient expenditure of resources. It is recursive, often painful, and resists the linear logic of “improvement.”

### **The Refusal of Optimisation**

The “Expert Memory Editor” is trained to get away with the trauma. However, Fox’s journey is defined by his refusal to delete the “bad” parts of Gabe. The “tiny kitchen in Aaru” represents the communicative

memory—the site of authentic, lived struggle. By choosing the “screaming” over the “postcard,” Fox aligns himself with the Romantic preference for the Sublime (pain/awe) over the Beautiful (pleasure/order). Fox realises that the “perfect Gabe” is a hollow signifier. The “real Gabe” is found in the friction, the noise, and the “interpersonal messiness” that the NIL/E algorithm identifies as “errors.”

The novel’s final ethical stance is centred on the “punishment” of memory. In a society that offers “forgetting” as a product, “remembering” becomes a moral duty. This reflects Aleida Assmann’s work on “Ethics and Memory,” where forgetting is seen as a form of violence against the victim. This “chaos” is the final victory of romantic subjectivity over technological rationality. It suggests that a “unified self” is less important than a “connected self.” This leads us directly into the conclusion that the “edited heart” is not broken, but a resilient heart, capable of finding “Forever” within the fragments.

## Conclusion

By navigating the dialectical tension between the “NIL/E” corporate infrastructure and the irreducible nature of human affect, the novel proves that Romanticism is not displaced by the digital age but is instead radically reshaped. The transition from the natural sublime to the digital sublime—manifested in the vast, granular “ocean of sand” and the recursive archives of the Field of Reeds—reclaims a space for awe and terror within the machine, ensuring that the human spirit remains at the centre of the technological infinite. Through the theoretical frameworks of Jan Assmann and Astrid Erll, this analysis has highlighted how memory functions as both a technological construct and a site of ethical resistance. The protagonist’s journey from a “managed subject” to an authentic “romantic subject” is predicated on the refusal of algorithmic optimisation. By choosing the “scar” of trauma over the “sanitised file,” Fox affirms that identity is rooted in the persistence of affect rather than the integrity of data. Love, in this context, functions as the ultimate “glitch”—a force of Romantic subjectivity that disrupts the linear, profit-driven logic of techno-capitalism. Ultimately, Tavares articulates a mode of post-human romance where emotional bonds transcend their biological or digital substrates. The “Edited Heart” is presented not as a broken entity, but as a resilient one, capable of finding “Forever” within the fragments of a mediated reality. This research contributes to the field of posthuman studies by asserting that as our technology becomes increasingly sophisticated, our literature must return to romantic ideals to safeguard the sanctity of the human experience. *Welcome to Forever* serves as a profound reminder that while technology provides the architecture of our future, it is the spontaneous overflow of emotion—the “aching beauty” of connection—that makes that future worth inhabiting. In the fracturing of the archive, the romantic spirit does not vanish; it glows more brightly within the shards.

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