

IMPACTS OF CONTEMPORARY DEVELOPMENTS ON GENERAL AND COMPARATIVE LITERATURE

Dolores Romero López

Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Spain

Alckmar Luiz dos Santos

Universidade de Santa Catarina, Brazil

Keywords: cyberculture, cyberliterature, communication, hypertext, humanism, computer sciences, supports, interdisciplinarity, digital literature, electronic literature, literature and Internet, literature and new technologies, paradigm, networks, literary theory.

Contents

1. The Search for Interdisciplinarity
 - 1.1. The Scientific and Technological Process
 - 1.2. The Resistance of the Literary Field
 - 1.3. An Intermediate Proposal: Interdisciplinarity
 2. The Impact of Technology and Literature's Interdisciplinarity
 - 2.1. Technology at the Service of Literature
 - 2.2. Digital Literature
 - 2.3. Literary Theory about Literature in Hypertext
 - 2.4. A New Paradigm for a New Humanism?
 3. Conclusions and Challenges
- Glossary
Bibliography
Biographical Sketches

Summary

The application of technology to information, communication, and culture has been through the history of humanity a key factor in social progress and well being. The impact of digital technology is vital for the contemporary culture and is leaving in it some identity tracks that are changing certain uses of the previous tradition. Similarly, the literary system is also being powerfully affected in three aspects. In the first place, computer resources have been used to preserve and edit literary texts, associating to them graphical material, links with related texts or with dictionaries, and, above all, developing search tools of concordance and syntactic/semantic analysis. Secondly, we are watching the birth of a digital literature, with new generic characteristics, new creators, with knowledge of both, technological mechanisms and literary resources, and a reader capable of interpreting and enjoying texts on the screen. Thirdly, literary theory has expressed new postulates with regard to the multiple authorship of digital texts, the disintegration of the textual meaning, the intertextuality and implications of the reader in the creation process and the interpretation of the texts. These three impacts imply, for some authors, the search of a new paradigm for the creation, reading, and interpretation of digital texts, which points to a new humanism.

1. The Search for Interdisciplinarity

The relations between literature and technology are nothing new, not even recent. And if we can still speak of novelty, regarding the title above, it is no longer in the adjective *comparative*, but, maybe, in the specific field of the digital technologies above mentioned. Nevertheless, considering all that has been written and affirmed since the sixties about the relations between literature and technology, we are facing disjunctive elements, in which one does not reduce itself nor imposes itself on the other. In this case, it is as if we were describing a conceptual space very similar to digital logic, in which only *zeros* and *ones* exist, and in which these and those do not annul each other, nor transform into a third element (in Boolean algebra, any operation done with *zeros* and *ones*, will have as a result only *zero* or *one*).

Thus, to explore this space of approaching and reproaching between (comparative) literature and (digital) technology, it will be necessary, first, to explain the misconceptions of this disjunction and to show that there has always been conflict, confrontation and concord, at the same time, between one and the other. Only after this stage, it will be possible to question what novelties these discussions still bring to the fields of literary studies. And, then, it will be possible to advance to what is really of interest, in other words, the mapping of tensions and intersections between comparative literature and the digital medium, proposing reflections that may, perhaps, incline the fields of comparative literary studies and provide, certainly, other ways of seeing, describing, utilizing and projecting the digital space.

Returning to the images of the *zeros* and *ones*, it is possible to speak of digitalization, or better yet, of binarization of the concepts and even of the discussions, when we enter the field of relations between literature and technology. In the other arts (mainly in the visual arts), this discussion is already part of the past; since the beginning of 20th century, no opposition of art with techniques and technologies has been established. Only in literature, this binarization still resists and contaminates the fields of literary studies. It seems that these have retained, of the information and communication technology, solely these dualities that do not go ahead, proposing incessantly oppositions without syntheses or solutions. *Zeros* and *ones* would be, thus, in all places, even in the reductionist and superficial way of understanding science, technology, art, and literature.

To discuss all these cases, these conflicting relations between literature and technology, is truly an arduous task, even if we consider what has been published in the last years. Many things have been said and written, and a good deal of them are contaminated or influenced by some type of dualist vision. Since most of the contemporary societies and cultures have entered or wish to enter decidedly in a condition that we may call as “high technological density”, we perceive without much difficulty that the information and communication technologies have acquired a certain degree of hegemony. And, in consequence to this hegemony, we go from a critical assimilation of techniques and processes of globalization, to a blind refusal. In other words, one practically eliminates any intermediate stages that can express another type of commitment that is not surrender or systematical refusal. In consequence, limiting oneself merely to what is published nowadays, with regards to this subject, would perhaps bring more problems

than clarify the situation. It could be more productive to retake some suggested discussions from more or less fifty years ago, when this process of high technological density was initiated.

1.1. The Scientific and Technological Process

Gilbert Simondon's thesis *Du mode d'existence des objets techniques* dates from the year 1958. In 1959, Charles Pierce Snow published *The Two Cultures*; five years later, in 1964, Umberto Eco launched his *Apocalittici e integrati*. In this same year of 1964, Snow gave the public a second reflection concerning the same theme: *The Two Cultures: A Second Look*. Evidently, Simondon, Snow and Eco were neither the first nor the only ones to discuss the relations of artists and literati with the techniques of technology. They would not be the last. Nevertheless, they represent distinct attempts of thinking the relations between literature and technology, in a moment when the overcrowding and consumption of industrial objects became overcrowding and consumption of processes. Of course, the perspectives proposed by Simondon and Eco had more relevance, they were more fertile, if one considers other intellectuals that discussed their proposals. However, of the three, perhaps Snow is the most paradigmatic for us to comprehend the limits and the simplifications of the current discussions about science, technology, and literature. In fact, *The Two Cultures*, in 1958, already had as a point of departure a disjunctive position, the same one that may be identified nowadays. On the other hand, if we take the discussions of Eco and Simondon, we would clearly perceive that there is no place for insurmountable disjunctions between science and literature (or art), for both allow a third element to be brought to scene: technology. With this, the manichaeist simplification breaks itself and the reflexive frame becomes rather complex, allowing a margin for rethinking science, literature (art), and technology in a much more open and fertile manner. For Snow, though, there is no glimpse of a way out from this opposition between science and literature, even if he claims to be writing his reflections in the sense of lowering the tensions and differences between one and the other. For him, there exists a large distance between the "literary intellectuals" (as he names them), on one side, and the "scientists", on the other. A barrier of prejudice is raised from part to part. The "non-scientists" (e.g. the artists, still according to his own nomenclature) are, according to Snow, firmly convinced that the scientists lack any conscience of the human condition; that their optimism is, at least, superficial. On the other hand, "scientists" believe that "literary intellectuals" are people of little vision; in truth, profoundly anti-intellectual and occupied in limiting art and thought to the *hic et nunc*.

1.2. The Resistance of the Literary Field

As in current discussions, in Snow there is a strict conception of science and, consequently, of the relations between science and literature. And still, by not having a clearer vision of the differences and relations between science and technology, his own concept of art and, by extension, of literature, is negatively affected. As a result, we have a series of simplistic arguments and manichaeisms (that owe nothing to the ones produced since the sixties). According to Snow, literature and science evolve at different rhythms (as if *evolution* was a unique and unquestionable paradigm to be applied to sciences, arts, and techniques); the literary intellectuals have all the temperament of luddists; and share an ineluctable incapacity for comprehending the

evolution of the technical processes and the scientific discoveries (both, progress and discoveries, placed at the same level). Snow gets to saying that the only worldly renown writer that seemed to have understood, in a certain way, the industrial revolution, is Ibsen (Snow,1968:44), without giving attention to innumerable others, as, for example, Balzac. And still, he gives no importance to the relations between imagination and technology, as if they were specific of art, and this was subordinated to science; as if both (imagination and technology) were not intimately linked to one another.

-
-
-

TO ACCESS ALL THE 17 PAGES OF THIS CHAPTER,
Visit: <http://www.eolss.net/Eolss-sampleAllChapter.aspx>

Bibliography

Aarseth, E. (1997). *Cybertext. Perspectives on Ergodic Literature*. Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press. [In *Cybertext*, Espen Aarseth explores the aesthetics and textual dynamics of digital literature and its diverse genres, including hypertext fiction, computer games, computer-generated poetry and prose, and collaborative Internet texts such as MUDs].

Abbey, B. ed. (2000). *Instructional and Cognitive Impacts of Web-based Education*, Hershey, Idea Group Pub. [Edited by Beverly Abbey, this book is an amalgam of instructional design guidelines, hyper-linking structure and computer screen designs].

Anis, J. (1998). *Texte et ordinateur, l'écriture réinventée*, Paris-Bruxelles, De Boeck. [Divided into six sections on different aspects of hypertext, this book offers a clear view of the subject].

Bernheimer, Ch. ed. (1995). *Comparative Literature in the Age of Multiculturalism*. Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins UP. [A classic study of Comparative Literature].

Blanco, E. (2003). "El canon en la era electrónica". En María José Vega (ed.), *Literatura hipertextual y teoría literaria*, Madrid, Marenostrum, pp. 63-72. [This chapter is about the persistence of the traditional canon in the electronic era].

Bolter, Jay D. (1991). *Writing Space: The Computer, Hypertext and the History of Writing*. New Jersey, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. [It focuses on the changes from manuscripts to printed texts]

Botley, Simon Ph. ed. (2000). *Multilingual Corpora In Teaching And Research*, Amsterdam, Rodopi. [This book aims to teach languages to students to become competent and independent learners].

Bush, Vannevar. (1945). "As We May Think". *Atlantic Monthly*. Julio, 101-108. [A classic study of Hypertext].

Casacuberta, D. (2003). *Creación colectiva. En Internet el creador es el público*, Barcelona, Gedisa. [In this essay, David Casacuberta explores the collective creation in Internet].

Chartier, Roger y Antonio Rodríguez de las Heras. (2001). "El futuro del libro y el libro del futuro", *Litterae (Cuadernos de Cultura Escrita)*, I, pp. 11-40. [This is a conversation between the two authors about the future of books and reading].

Codina, L. (2000). *El libro digital y la WWW*. Madrid, Tauro Producciones. [It focuses on the changes from manuscripts to printed texts].

- Díaz, Paloma, Catenazzi, Nadia, Aedo, I. (1996). *De la multimedia a la hipermedia*. Madrid, RA-MA. [Standard Spanish text for exploring the notions of hypertextual structures, multimedia, hypermedia and e-books].
- Douglas, J. Y. (2000), *The End Of Books-Or Books Without End? Reading Interactive Narratives*. Ann Arbor, The University of Michigan Press. [In this famous book, J. Douglas responds to different questions about the future of books and reading].
- Fokkema, D. (1982). "Comparative Literature and the New Paradigm". *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature*, 1, 1-18 (traducido en Romero López, D. (1998) *Orientaciones en literatura comparada*, 149-172). [This article explores the changes on Comparative Literature in a Postmodern Paradigm].
- Gómez Trueba, T. (2005). "La literatura electrónica y sus antecedentes en la cultura impresa". In <http://www.liceus.com/bonos/compra1.asp?idproducto=509> [It focuses on the changes from manuscripts to printed texts]
- Kuhn, Thomas, S. (1970). *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press. [Thomas Kuhn analyses what is a new paradigm].
- Landow, G. (1991). *Hypermedia and literary Studies*. Cambridge, Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press. [A classic author of Hypermedia and Contemporary Critical Theory]
- Landow, G. (1992). *Hypertext: The Convergence of Contemporary Critical Theory and Technology*. Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press. [In this book Landow continues to explore the relationship between contemporary literary theory and digital literature].
- Landow, G. (1997). *Hypertext 2.0*. Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press. [Standard text that offers critical reflections about the changes of the new digital era].
- Landow, G. (2006). *Hypertext 3.0: New Media and Critical Theory in an Era of Globalization*. Baltimore, The John Hopkins University Press. [Last version of this canonical text that offers critical reflections about digital changes in the era of globalization].
- Moulthrop, S. (1989). "In the Zones Hypertext and the Politics of Interpretation". In <http://iat.ubalt.edu/moulthrop/essays/zones.html>. [A classic study of Hypertext]
- Murray, J. (1997). *Hamlet On The Holodeck. The Future Of Narrative In Cyberspace*. New York, The Free Press. [This book is an amalgam of immersive trances, multiform plots and procedural authors with some examples based on Star Trek, World Wide Web and Don Quixote].
- Nelson, T. (1987). *Literary Machines*. San Antonio Tejas, T. Nelson. [*Literary Machines* is Ted Nelson's original and definitive exploration of Project Xanadu, an original hypertext system].
- Orihuela, José L. "El narrador en ficción interactiva. El jardinero y el laberinto", *Hipertulia*. In <http://www.ucm.es/info/especulo/hipertul/califia.htm>. [Taking M.D. Coverley's hypermedia novel *Califia* as a model, Orihuela analyses in this essay the function of the narrator in interactive fictions].
- Pajares Tosca, S. (1997). "Las posibilidades de la narrativa hipertextual", *Espéculo*, 6. En <http://www.ucm.es/info/especulo/numero6/index.htm>. [This is an electronic article about the possibilities of the hypertextual narrations].
- Pajares Tosca, S. (2004), *Literatura Digital. El Paradigma Hipertextual*. Cáceres, Universidad de Extremadura. [A study of hypertext and its application in education].
- Pajares Tosca, S. (2005) "El impacto de la informática y las redes de la comunicación en la literatura". In Liceus, Portal de Humanidades, <http://www.liceus.com/bonos/compra1.asp?idproducto=159> [A clear reference about the impacts of contemporary developments on general literature].
- Rossi, P. (1989). *Os Filósofos e as Máquinas*. São Paulo, Companhia das Letras, 1989. [Critical reflections on the influence of the technological era in the human life].
- Romero López, D.(2006). "Hypertext: A Third Shift of Paradigm for Comparative Literatures". En Mildonian, Paola (ed.) *A partire da Venezia: eredità, transiti, orizzonti. Cinquant'anni dell'AILC*. Venecia, Università Ca'Foscari Venecia. [This article is about the necessity of talking about a new change of paradigm taking into account the new digital changes].

Santos Unamuno, E.(2003). “En torno a una posible tradición de escritura no secuencial”. En María José Vega (ed.), *Literatura hipertextual y teoría literaria*, Madrid, Marenostrum, pp. 73-104. [This article is about the hypertextual structures of canonical written literary texts].

Snow, Charles P.(1968). *Les Deux Cultures*. Trad. de Claude Noël. Paris , J. J. Pauvert Editeur. [This book offers a comparison between the techno-culture and the tradicional one.]

Swiggers, P.(1982) “A new paradigm for Comparative Literature”. *Poetics Today*, 3.1, 181-184. [This article and the one by Fokkema, cited above, explores the changes on Comparative Literature in a Postmodern Paradigm].

Toshi, Luca (1996). “Hypertext and Authorship”. En Geoffrey Nunberg (ed.) *The Future of the Book*. Berkeley, The University of California Press. pp.200-210. In <http://english.ttu.edu/kairos/2.1/reviews/honeycutt/hypertext.html> [The article offers a very interesting reflection on how is the authorship in the hypertexts].

Tötösy De Zepetnek, S. (2001). *Comparative Literatura. Theory, Method, Application*. Ámsterdam, Atlanta, GA, Rodopi. [In this book the critic Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek discusses the postmodern quality of Comparative Literature and Hypermedia]

Vouillamoz, N. (2000), *Literatura e Hipermedia. La irrupción de la literatura interactiva: precedentes y crítica*. Barcelona, Paidós. . [In this essay Nuria Vouillamoz revises the changes introduced by digital texts in the literary field.].

Biographical Sketches

Dolores Romero López was born in Toledo, Spain, the 14th of March, 1965. She studied Spanish Philology at the University of Salamanca, Spain, where she obtained her Ph. D on Spanish Contemporary Poetry. Later she went to University of Nottingham (U.K.) where she studied Critical Theory and Comparative Literature. She has published the following books: *Orientaciones en Literatura Comparada* (Madrid: Arco Libros, 1998), *Una relectura del fin de siglo en el marco de la Literatura Comparada* (Berna: Peter Lang, 1998), *Naciones literarias* (ed. Barcelona: Anthropos, 2006) and *Seis siglos de poesía española escrita por mujeres* (ed. Berna: Peter Lang, 2006). Her research interests include Spanish Literature, Comparative Literature and Literaty Studies in the Digital Age. Currently, she is a teacher of the Spanish Literature Department at the University Complutense of Madrid (UCM). Prof. Romero is a member of LEETHI Research Group (Literaturas Españolas y Europeas del Texto al Hipertexto), an interdisciplinary research group dedicated to the study of literature and computers. She is the Chair of the Research Committee on Comparative Literature in the Digital Age (CLDA) of the International Comparative Literature Association (ICLA).

Alckmar Luiz dos Santos is graduated in electronics engineering, has a master in Literary Theory (The State University of Campinas, Brazil) and a PhD in Literary Studies (Paris 7 University). He is professor of Brazilian Literature in the Federal University of Santa Catarina (Brazil) and a researcher of the CNPq (Technological and Scientific Development National Committee). His main research project refers to literature and digital medium. He is also essayist, poet, and novelist.