

Digital literary practices: reading, writing and speaking about creation

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The expansion of the Internet and Web 2.0 has brought about unprecedented changes in literary practices, well beyond the mere digitization of books. The proliferation of electronic reading devices, self-published works, applications for creating multimodal or paraliterary genres like digital story-telling, memes or postcard poems and the appearance of text-sharing web platforms like fanfiction.net or Wattpad are together beginning to shape a new ecosystem of ways of creating, distributing, reading, discussing and using literature, as well as broadening the traditional typology of genres to include new forms like fanfic, vlogs, BookTube and book previews.

Gee (2004) has called these new points of online encounter “affinity spaces”, adapting for the Internet the earlier concept of “community of practice” (Wenger, 1998), taken from sociocultural learning theory. According to this theory, people who share interests and interact among themselves in order to broaden their knowledge end up developing their own set of practices with distinct traits — often coining their own particular “language” — and sharing their learning experiences. We see this happening nowadays with many young people who have literary interests: they discover spaces on the Internet, make contact with peers who share their passions and end up involved in the creation and/or analysis of multi-varied forms of literary endeavour.

These literary practices comprise a broad panoply that includes video, photography, audio material and hypermedia. They are plurilingual, produced in multiple varieties of various languages and exhibiting translingualism and code switching; they make reference to a broad range of cultures; they are profoundly cooperative and participatory, through online remixing, beta reading and forums; and yet they are also transgressive, often fandoms linked to music groups, videogames, otaku subculture or fanfiction and situated at “the fringes of the law” (i.e. of the traditional literary canon or the dominant aesthetic).

The present compilation volume addresses this fascinating, dynamic world where technology interfaces with creativity in reading, writing and literature through articles

by 17 scholars who, though coming from somewhat different points of departure and reflecting differing research interests and methods, are all committed to the rigorous interpretation of empirical evidence.

Certain affinity spaces tend to generate much more research interest because of their intense popularity on the Internet. Two articles here focus on one such phenomenon, the BookTube community, where users create and share videos that review and discuss works of literature. First, Karen S. López-Gil and Fanny Patricia Franco-Chávez offer the case study of a preteen Colombian booktuber who, with the consent of her family and institutional support, has become a media phenomenon in the region of Cali. Her case illustrates one way that users can participate in activities that serve to promote the habit of reading in the general public. Next, Lenin Paladines-Paredes and Cristina Aliagas look at the output of the 17 most popular Spanish-speaking booktubers on the Internet and, through careful content and discourse genre analysis, uncover the prototypical structure and main features of this video book review genre.

The next three articles look at the affinity spaces that exist on various social networks. Alba Torrego, Boris Vazquez-Calvo and David García-Marín describe and interpret the case of a young Spanish writer who uses the *nom de plume* Blue Jeans. Despite having been initially rejected by various publishers, this author was ultimately taken on board by the Planeta publishing house after he had already achieved online fame by starting a blog and then prolifically interacting with his young readership. In this article the authors compare his views, obtained through a semistructured interview, with a content analysis of nearly 4,000 comments about him and his work taken from the social networks including Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, YouTube and TikTok. This study documents a new ecology of direct exchange between author and readers that is currently undergoing development on the Internet.

Next, Patricia Sánchez-García, José Hernández-Ortega and José Rovira-Collado take as the object of study 19 quality works of literature in Spanish for children or teenagers available on the Goodreads platform. Focusing on the evaluations that these works have received in a total of 588 reviews posted on the site, the authors analyse the characteristics of these reviews and the number of readings and comments the works have obtained. This study shows in detail the possibilities offered by this space, an alternative to professional literary criticism, in which readers can exchange reading experiences and even learn how to become better and more informed readers.

The last study related to social networks, by Andrea Castro-Martínez and Pablo Díaz-Morilla, focuses on Twitter and explores how tweeters appropriate the potentialities of the space to construct literary narratives. Specifically, the authors analyse the 16 threads (consisting of 1,300 tweets) selected by juries at the first two editions of Twitter Spain's Feria del Hilo ("Thread Fair"), which collectively generated more than seven million exchanges on the Internet. This study describes the content and form of these tweeted narratives, in addition to providing data on their impact and the resources such as hashtags and narrative style deployed by these tweeters. It also lays the methodological groundwork for a new approach to analysing Web 2.0 literary creations.

Two other articles centre on the affinity spaces linked to universities and reading clubs, an emerging reader-driven practice that has been reinforced in meaning and popularity by the Covid-19 pandemic. First, Agnès Santamarta and Lluís Agustí explore Spanish-language digital reading clubs for adults that were active in 2019. After contacting Spanish libraries and universities and looking online for related discussion groups, they identified 24 such reading clubs. Here the authors analyse how these entities function, the platforms they employ, the dynamics of online interchanges among users and what their users feel about them. Next, Inés Rodríguez, Elena Ramírez, María Clemente and Jorge Martín-Domínguez look at the participation of families with children aged 2 to 7 in online discussion groups linked to a brick-and-mortar library in the city of Salamanca on the basis of analysing online interactions, identifying the roles and functions of the group's moderators and the multimodal ways in which participating readers take part in literature-related discussions. Both of these studies offer insights and shed new light on an emerging phenomenon which is transforming the activity of public libraries.

Finally, Lucas Ramada-Prieto, Martina Fittipaldi and Mireia Manresa examine yet one more emerging literary practice, namely digital fiction or multimedia literary works which dispense with paper altogether. Using Merlin Goodbrey's *The Empty Kingdom* as an example, they analyse the role of the implicit reader and the various means of rhetorical participation available, as well as the reactions to this work of some 50 adolescent readers. The article explores the possibilities offered by fully multimodal reading processes while simultaneously exemplifying some novel methods by which to analyse such works.

It is important to note that the varied collection of studies we offer here merely hint at the potential of this rich field for research. This sampling leaves out, for example, equally interesting studies on digital reading practices in connection with music group fandoms, online poetry, literary computer programmes or YouTuber dynamics as applied to the classroom. Other topics having received as yet little scholarly attention — or none at all — include areas such as online storytelling, fanfiction, television series or the world of comics, which has its own particular socialization, discussion and translation practices. It is our sincere hope that other similar volumes will follow the path taken here to further advance our knowledge of the exciting changes currently underway that are transforming literary socialization practices.

References

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