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THE "NARRATIVE TURN" IN LITERATURE. OBSERVATIONS ON DIGITAL WORKS

Abstract: The transformation of literary models was born out of a process initiated by the avant-garde and is still present nowadays in the form of the post avant-garde, understood as the creation of many new manifestations of literary expressions, including digital literature. The aim of the article is to analyse the forms, changes and structures of digital literature in comparison to the procedures of so-called "traditional literature". The methodology is based on comparative literature. The topic is viewed from the perspective of Ibero-American literature exemplified with proto-hypertexts, hypertexts and literary hypermedia from Latin America. As a summary, we can say that digital literature is not going to change literature, but it is going to introduce new literary aesthetics which, in turn, will provide literature with new, different, and experimental narrative structures.

Keywords: narrative turn, Latin American literature, digital literature, hypertext, hypermedia

The aim of this article is to analyse the forms, changes and structures of digital literature compared to procedures that are present in "traditional literature", in order to answer the question whether traditional procedures used in literary criticism can be applied in the studies on new models of digital literature. The employed methodology relates to comparative literature. Henry Remak introduces the term "comparative literature" below:

> Comparative literature is a study on literature outside a specific country, as well as the study of the relationship between literature and other areas of opinions and knowledge, such as art (e.g. painting, sculpture, architecture and music), philosophy, history, sociology, religion, etc. In summary,

it is a comparison between different literatures or a comparison of litera-
ture to other domains of human expression.[1]

Literature as a historical concept covered many areas and was conceived
in various ways. It is not possible to define a specific border of literature or to
approach it from a single perspective, as that would result in limiting its full
meaning. In my article, I analyse the aspects that relate to online literature and
I speculate on what can potentially arise from hypertextual forms, and whether
new narrative forms can be born from the relationship between literature and
the Internet. Currently, there are numerous links between the worlds of lite-
rature and the Internet, so one could ask the questions: what is the nature
of the relationship between these two worlds and how does one of the forms
fit into the other? Is the Internet merely a new medium in literature or is it
a completely new element within literature and literary criticism? Such ques-
tions are crucial because, according to some people, online creativity cannot
be considered literature and therefore we cannot officially recognise any im-
portant writers or artistic trends on the Internet. On the other hand, we have
to admit that online literature plays a very important role. Hence the question:
how are these narratives defined and formed within the Internet user's activity
process, and what shapes can reception and appropriation of new forms take
within this "new literature"?

A literary work is not merely a huge structure made of elements and
components that define it. We could say that a literary composition is a mo-
del. However, it should be remembered that today's writing no longer has
a representative function. Therefore, a single text does not represent all texts,
but only serves as an "entrance into a network with a thousand entrances".[2]
In this way, the text itself functions as a border, border. A traditional idea of
a book means an enclosed structure (a literary piece or other text) limited by
a specific boundary. On the Internet, literature becomes free, it breaks away
from the limit of a closed space imposed by its own structure. The concept of
literature associated only with books appears to be obsolete; there is no place
for it in today's world, because literature has become elusive, it exists on the
Internet, so it can be freely changed and transformed. The book, previously
integral and solid, is slowly dissolving, and literature is liberating itself from
being "pigeonholed", from its own boundaries.

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[1]   N. Carbonell, M. J. Vega, *La literatura comparada: principios y métodos*, transl. A.W., Gredos,
     Madrid 1998, p. 89.
[2]   R. Barthes, *S/Z*, transl. R. Miller, Blackwell Publishing, Oxford 2002, p. 12.

Digital literature does not mean traditional stories which have become digitalised, by which we understand entering printed or handwritten materials into computer memory, but works of a digital origin which are by definition digital objects, created using a computer and requiring a computer to be read. Digital literature makes use of hypertext and/or hypermedia. In order to handle a large number of documents and articles, Vannevar Bush creates an analogue computer called the memex system in 1940; in 1960, adventure games start appearing and Theodor Holm Nelson invents the Xanadu system; he also coins the term "hypertext". Hypertext defined as "non-linear and non-sequential data organisation where text is broken down into fragments that are linked in various ways with links"[3] emerged in 1965 and has significantly influenced contemporary literature in the form of hyperfiction, i.e. literature with a hypertextual structure. A hypertext novel is a work created using a hypertext system and displayed on an electronic screen. Such text has interactive features, it invites the reader to participate in creating/exploring a novel; the reader is both a traveller and co-author. In addition to being interactive, literary hypertexts are characterised by their non-linear and unstructured nature which offers different methods of "navigation"; such a hypertext is open and therefore has no beginning and no end. The techniques used in hyperfiction include: circle, counterpoint, montage and mirror worlds. Hypertext literature can be divided according to the place of publication into hyperfiction published on disc (stand alone hypertext) and online hyperfiction (available on the Internet); according to the form of reading – there are read-only hypertexts that are not interactive, but there are also constructive hypertexts where, in addition to exploring the story, the reader can make modifications within the text; and according to the genre: there are cyberdramas and hypermedia (hypertext enriched with multimedia content, e.g. image, film, sound or dialogue). Possible lexical problems should be noted here – they are the side effect of hypertext being a "dynamic" form that undergoes transformation, often resulting in the lack of terms to describe new phenomena associated with hyperfiction; sometimes they have not yet been created and sometimes critics use English terms which have no equivalents in other languages. Admittedly, the majority of hypertextual works are published in English and those remain the focus of critics most of the time. In my opinion, Latin American literature remains mostly forgotten. It had a significant impact on the evolution of literary hypertext through proto-hypertexts, such as the works by Julio Cortázar; I am referring here to *Hopscotch* published in 1966 (originally published in Spanish in 1963)

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[3] M. Pisarski, *Hipertekst - definicje*, transl. A. W., http://www.techsty.art.pl/hipertekst/definicje.htm (15.07.2020).

or *The Book of Sand* by Jorge Luis Borges, published in 1977 (Spanish: 1975), as well as Laura Esquivel's first multimedia novel of 1996, entitled *The Law of Love* (Spanish: 1995). "Proto-hypertexts are works that are experimental in their material form, violating cause-effect relations, undermining well-established plot patterns, or utilising non-linear ways of storytelling"[4]. The features of a proto-hypertext include: non-sequentiality, poetry of fragments, interactivity and polyphony. Some "traditional" printed works, where authors struggle with problems resulting from formal restrictions that can be solved thanks to multi-medialisation, should be classified as proto-hypertexts. Proto-hypertextuality is based on meta-narrative procedures and/or on visual elements. Proto-hypertexts make use of rhizomatic[5] metaphors which correspond to the structure of a hypertext and its associative movement. *Hopscotch* by Cortázar serves an as example of a proto-hypertext. Zofia Chądzyńska[6], who translated the novel into Polish, believed that it should not be approached as an anti-novel, as this term had long lost its meaning, but at the same time it could not be considered a novel because its structure and content do not correspond to the principles of a classic novel. There are several books inside of it, but mainly two. One of them should be read chronologically, starting from chapter 1 to 56, and the other one starts from chapter 73, progressing further according to the numbers that appear at the end of each chapter or with the help of the index table.[7] Chądzyńska notes that *Hopscotch* deals with all kinds of topics, but they are being shuffled like cards, always remaining fluid, in constant motion; it does not aim to be monumental, complete or defined. And perhaps Cortázar's greatest achievement is that through all the fragmentation and borderless nature, his book, unlike any other, forces us to think and use our imagination.[8] Borges accentuates the importance of key themes used in proto-hypertexts, such as: a library, labyrinth, doppelganger or metamorphosis, which were present in such works as: *The Aleph* (originally published in Spanish in 1945, in English in 1970), *The Book of Sand or The Garden of Forking Paths* (Spanish: 1941, English: 1948). *The Law of Love* by Esquivel is the first multimedia novel where syncretism of forms (popular music by Liliana Felipe and classical music by

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[4]   M. Hopfinger, *Literatura między sztuką a komunikacją*, in: *Obraz literatury w komunikacji społecznej po roku '89*, eds. A. Werner, T. Żukowski, Pro Cultura Litteraria, Instytut Badań Literackich PAN, Warszawa 2013, p. 14, transl. A. W.

[5]   G. Deleuze, F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, transl. B. Massumi, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1987.

[6]   Z. Chądzyńska, *Posłowie*, in: *Gra w klasy*, J. Cortázar, transl. Z. Chądzyńska, Czytelnik, Warszawa 1968.

[7]   J. Cortázar, *Table of Instructions*, in: *Hopscotch*, J. Cortázar, transl. G. Rabassa, Pantheon Books, New York 1966.

[8]   Z. Chądzyńska, *Posłowie*.

Giacomo Puccini, Miguelanxo Prado's comic book elements, as well as dance intermedia and a novel) can be seen, alongside dialogue between the author and the reader, simultaneity, lack of time-space coherence (the times of Hernán Cortés/year 2200), fragmentation and collage. We also should not forget about numerous contemporary authors of hypertextual texts from Latin America, especially from Colombia, such as Jaime Alejandro Rodríguez Ruíz, the author of *Gabriella Infinita* (2000) and *Golpe de gracia* (2006), and the Chilean writer Carlos Labbé, the author of *Pentagonal: incluidos tú y yo* (2001). I mention briefly some examples from Latin America below.

Gabriella Infinita first appeared as a regular book, then as a hypertext and eventually as hypermedia. It is characterised by its chaotic structure; the reader has an opportunity to read the book from the perspectives of various protagonists, there are references to different forms of art, such as photography, painting or music. In his literary descriptions, the author also employs techniques that are usually associated with film and painting. In 2007, Rodríguez Ruíz won the first prize in a hypermedia competition in the Spanish language for his *Golpe de gracia*. In this narrative hypermedia, the reader takes part in an interactive multimedia literary game that is close to a digital video game, has an option of choosing different protagonists and discovers the details of the main character's life by solving clues and riddles. *Pentagonal: incluidos tú y yo* by Labbé lives somewhere between a press article and hypertext, where a fragment of a newspaper article about a car accident becomes the pretext to create a hypertextual form, using words printed in bold as links referring to other texts. The structure of the novel is chaotic and represents the thinking processes of the main characters. Juan B. Gutiérrez is the author of *Condiciones extremas* (1998) and *El primer vuelo de los hermanos Wright* (1996-1998). *Condiciones extremas* is the first science fiction hyper-novel in Spanish. The reader can choose whether they want to view images, read a book or "navigate" a multimedia text. The plot takes place in three different time periods, all of them featuring the same characters; time itself is the main theme the novel is based around, which would be impossible to represent/implement in the traditional book form. The author also invites the reader to comment on and exchange opinions about his work via email, creating a bridge between the hypertext and mail art. In contrast to *Condiciones extremas, El primer vuelo de los hermanos Wright* is an experiment on linear literature in the digital world. Each page has a single link which allows the reader to continue the story. However, if the reader decides to return to the previous page, the link will be different this time, as a result of a narrative optimisation process carried out by the system. The reader has to follow the path set by the author. Through this piece, Gutiérrez aims to prove that fragmentation and non-linearity alone do not serve as the defining features

of hyperfiction. *Tierra de Extracción* (1996-2007) by the Venezuelan author Doménico Chiappe is a multimedia novel featuring links leading to text, music, photography and plastic arts. His book is made of five stories that can be read separately, but they are also a part of the whole – the sixth story. The book can be read in a passive or active way, depending on whether or not the reader uses a map. Belén Gache from Argentina is the author of: *Wordtoys* (1996-2006), *El diario del niño burbuja* (*Bubble Boy Diary*, 2004), *Purpúreas Orquídeas* (*Purple Orchids*, 1997), *Mujeres vampiro invaden Colonia del Sacramento* (*Vampire Women invade Sacramento Colony*, 2002) and *El libro del Fin del Mundo* (*The Book of the End of the World*, 2002). *Wordtoys* is a traditional book available on the Internet that provides the option of hypertextual reading through links on pages written in a traditional way. The author reflects on the relationship between traditional and hypertextual books. *El diario del niño burbuja* is a text about the struggles of everyday life in first-person narration. The project came into existence on the Internet as a hundred of posts that were published within one hundred consecutive days. There was no defined plot, as it was a work in progress that came out of nowhere, having no clear direction. *Purpúreas Orquídeas* and *Mujeres vampiro invaden Colonia del Sacramento* are works composed of hypertextual cyclical poems, creating a hypertext that lives on the border of poetry and prose, while in the case of *El libro del Fin del Mundo* the author refers to creation through deconstruction. Fragments of surviving books create an encyclopaedic book of the end of the world. The traditional book should be supplemented by excerpts published by the author on the Internet, as well as a CD.

New types of literary expression were born within the literary avant-garde circles, sparking up arguments about traditional and experimental forms of writing, as well as fierce disputes about the past and the future. Fictitiousness is one of the most important elements of literary avant-garde. In Latin American literature, the transformation of literary models actually begins within avant-garde movements. The works of Jorge Luis Borges, Julio Cortázar, Macedonio Fernández and Adolfo Bioy Casares, among others, relate to hidden spaces which create fiction. They are no longer a representation of reality and become "pure fiction". In fact, contemporary literature should be best approached in the context of post avant-garde understood as the creation of various new types of literary expression, including digital literature. In the 1990s, literary hypertexts already contributed to some heated debates due to their form and assimilation of other contexts, and formats of literature. Digital literature means breaking up with tradition and crossing the border of the avant-garde. We can say that this kind of literature entails an open debate between tradition and change, modernity and postmodernity. New formats of literary expression in the postmodern culture, along with hypertextuality, allow us to cross traditional

boundaries in the writing style of the modern era. Today we are dealing with a new generation of writers who use video games as a form of literature (or vice versa) and eagerly apply various virtual reality media, such as blogs, stop motion (which combines animation with literature), photography and cinema, etc. All these new tools and features are combined with literature using so-called telematics elements. While creating their works, the authors use the Internet which hosts numerous communities for virtual writers, such as: Vootext (consisting of people who like to read, share their own texts, as well as express their opinion on other texts), Vimeo, Twitter, etc. They utilize new methods to maintain discourses, using virtual and/or digital hypertextual and hypermedia tools, such as a blog, mailing list, photoblog, video blog, podcast, forum, chat, wiki, Content Management System (CMS), social networking, e-learning, mail, etc.

We can say that the concept of a border allows us to describe the way in which literary spaces are defined. "According to Mikhail Spariosu[9], literature identifies itself with the idea of a game and, as a result, a literary discourse itself becomes a game, a type of a border or an intermediary between various domains and contexts. It can be assumed that the source of this ability of literary texts lies in their fictional character, i.e. a transition state between what is and what is not".[10] What Spariosu refers to as a boundary or an intermediary, is the basis for defining the distinction between proto-hypertexts and hypertexts. Proto-hypertextual literature abolishes the boundaries of reality (as defined by Roland Barthes[11]), fiction, space-time, narrative voice and actants which served as models in literature before Fyodor Dostoyevsky (according to Mikhail Bakhtin[12]). A reader who is not willing to interact and approaches literature in a traditional way, is a passive reader devoid of dynamics. To paraphrase Barthes, we can say that a reader who has not been given an opportunity to admire the charm and sensuality of literature, can only accept or reject literature, can only read it, but is unable to write.[13] The author (beginning from the avant-garde) invites the reader to enter a game of fiction, to become what Barthes refers to

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[9]   M. I. Spariosu, *The Wreath of Wild Olive. Play, Liminality and the Study of Literature*, State University of New York Press, New York 1997.
[10]   F. Cabo Aseguinolaza, M. do Cebreiro Rábade Villar, *Manual de Teoría de la literatura*, Castalia, Madrid 2006, p. 94, transl. A. W.
[11]   R. Barthes, *S/Z*, p. 23.
[12]   M. M. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, ed. and transl. C. Emerson, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1984.
[13]   "This reader is thereby plunged into a kind of idleness – he is intransitive; he is, in short, *serious*: instead of functioning himself, instead of gaining access to the magic of the signifier, to the pleasure of writing, he is left with no more than the poor freedom either to accept or reject the text: reading is nothing more than a *referendum*." R. Barthes, *S/Z*, p. 4.

as an active reader. Such a reader not only takes part in the author's fiction, but actually becomes part of the fiction, which is another component of the narrative and an element that creates the whole experience. The reader who meets this requirement, no longer serves as a mere recipient of the document or text, but instead becomes the reader-player, the reader-author.

The Internet implies the contextualisation and automation of textual processes and fragments which, in turn, are the constructs of a narrative expressed in many ways, and are intertwined. The Internet serves as an open space for discourses that are in constant construction and deconstruction[14] due to their dynamic and interactive nature. In addition, they are complex textual mechanisms, both literary and fictional. Digital narratives are transformed into digital maps with rhizomatic features, which we navigate on. However, it is worth noting that, on the one hand, new discursive and narratological online procedures are characterised by ubiquitous dynamism, but on the other hand, they contain tag's and flag's structures which introduce internal boundaries, creating limits for reading a text. Using integrated search tools (Web Robots also known as Web Wanderers, Crawlers or Spiders), they anticipate the reader's intentions and define the limits for movement inside and outside the text. The structure of the text is still rhizome in its nature, but it becomes impossible to navigate infinitely and without limits. This relates to the purpose of a text and its internal layout. The Internet is a dimension inside and outside the space, it abolishes the traditional structure in which discourses exist, because everything online is both fictional and discursive in its nature. The fact that a text is "virtual" makes it possible for readers to notice that everything is constructed using a fictional format and, consequently, everything turns into discourse. As Jean Baudrillard[15] once said, everything becomes a sign. Techniques that use the simultaneity and multiplicity of texts and actions, as well as experimental forms of narration, indicate that hypertextual literature was born out of a process initiated by the avant-garde and existing to this day in the form of the post avant-garde. Therefore, "new literature" can be defined from the perspective of proto-hypertextual and hypertextual texts. These forms reject the understanding of a text in its classical form which relies on space-time logic, both within the narrative and its medium. The power of space-time logic determines the scope of influence of the form of a literary text and, as a result, defines its context and sets its boundaries. Barthes[16] refers to the "classic text" as a "readerly text" (as opposed

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[14] J. Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, transl. A. Bass, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1978.
[15] J. Baudrillard, *The Precession of Simulacra*, in: *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader*, ed. J. Storey, Pearson, Harlow 2009.
[16] R. Barthes, *S/Z*, pp. 4-5.

to "writerly text") that does not undergo any changes. Proto-hypertextual and hypertextual literature has abolished such boundaries, as well as the traditional "readerly" form of a text.

As a summary, we can say that digital literature is not going to change literature, but it is going to introduce new literary aesthetics which, in turn, will provide literature with new, different, and experimental narrative structures.

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„ZWROT NARRACYJNY" W LITERATURZE. ZAPISKI O LITE-RATURZE CYFROWEJ
(streszczenie)

Transformacja modeli literackich zrodziła się z procesu zapoczątkowanego awangardą i trwającego do dziś w postaci postawangardy, rozumianej jako kreacja wielu nowych przejawów ekspresji literackiej, wśród których znajduje się literatura cyfrowa. Celem artykułu jest analiza form, zmian i struktur literatury cyfrowej w porównaniu z procedurami tzw. „literatury tradycyjnej". Metodologia pracy opiera się na literaturze porównawczej. Temat potraktowany został z perspektywy literatury iberoamerykańskiej, za przykład posłużyły protohipertksty, hiperteksty i hipermedia literackie z obszaru Ameryki Łacińskiej. Odnosząc się do wniosków możemy powiedzieć, że literatura cyfrowa nie zmieni literatury, jedynie zaproponuje nowe estetyki literackie, a w ramach nich odmienne i eksperymentalne struktury narratologiczne.

Słowa kluczowe: zwrot narracyjny, literatura latynoamerykańska, literatura cyfrowa, hipertekst, hipermedia

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