

Preface

Progress (in education) is not in the succession of studies but in the development of new attitudes towards, and new interests in, experience. -- John Dewey (1897)

How many times do we come across quotes from centuries ago which, not having become anachronistic, still have not had the fortune to be heard by many? Dewey's (1897) statement in the epigraph is one such case. We live at a time of enormous readjustments, especially in the use and dissemination of media. We have gone past the era of storing and processing information into one of knowing how to access and manage it. In the area of literature, ever more information on literary production is being distributed and retrieved in electronic form (for instance, audiobooks and e-books; also see Toolan, this volume). New ways of reading emerge with consequences for learning and research environments at educational institutions. It is high time we open ourselves to these new possibilities and learn how to deal with them.

Today's popularization of modern technologies has allowed scholars in the Humanities, including literature specialists, to access an array of novel opportunities in the digital medium, which have also brought about an equal number of challenges and questions. However, very little has been provided for the advance of literary education. With a few exceptions here and there, the Humanities still resist turning to digital forms. This is vividly brought up by Davidson and Goldberg (2009: 8), who describe the present state in many schools around the world as one where "how we teach, where we teach, who we teach, who teaches, who administers, and who services – have changed mostly around the edges. The fundamental aspects of learning institutions remain remarkably familiar and have done so for something like two hundred years or more".

In fact, when faced with innovations in technology, the typical attitude of teachers of literature who resist change is to go from an initial rejection to a gruntled acceptance. They gradually adapt to new technology until it becomes naturalized (cf. Bax, 2003) and they cannot really do without it any more. Ironically enough, when they think they have mastered the technology, another new scenario will have appeared and the cycle repeats itself. One would expect, therefore, that learning processes

would take place as a rule, so that new technological introductions would be embraced somewhat faster. Unfortunately, that does not generally tend to be the case.

Compared to the reaction of those working in the natural sciences, the vigorous rejection of any novel development in literary studies is in some ways worrying. For one, it is energy wasted because, as the cycle repeats itself again and again, it requires cognitive and emotional energy that could have been better spent on more useful ideas or projects. Adding to that, as the cycle eventually leads to full acceptance of the new technology anyway, it makes the initial refusal useless.

Aware of this situation, the contributors of *Literary Education and Digital Learning: Methods and Technologies for Humanities Studies* offer a deep probe into relevant issues in literary education and digital learning from both a research and an educational perspective. Admittedly, there is nothing wrong with not knowing everything about new gadgets. Today's youngsters have developed their own styles of communication regardless of our attitudes as adults and, indeed, there may even be some attraction in learning from them from time to time. We hope that once our readers evaluate the experiences collected here, they will be able to make a cost/benefit analysis of the current situation in literary studies with regard to information technology and decide for themselves the path to be taken.

Both the foreword and the afterword to this volume intend to bring provocative topics to light. These are meant to help readers position themselves in relation to the issues involved in digital literary learning. In the opening of the present volume, Michael Toolan (University of Birmingham) sets the tone by developing a number of possibilities which have been brought about to the literature field by new technologies. At the same time, conscious of its limitations, the foreword also expands on what computers have not done so far.

The book is then divided into two main parts: research and education. The first one, which comprises four chapters, collects studies that clearly indicate how technologies may be employed in literary research. In other words, its aim is to understand how computers and programs may help scholars and students investigate literary works in novel ways, thus bringing new perspectives to the area. In the first chapter, Patrick Juola (Duquesne University) discusses how feasible it is to uncover the author of a given text. In clear prose, he describes some of the possibilities of this evolving field and considers its application to literary studies. Also acknowledging the importance of authorship, Lisa Lena Opas-Hänninen (University of Oulu) addresses, from a statistical viewpoint, the topic of change in one's literary writing. In this case, she looks into eleven texts in prose written by Samuel Beckett in order to check their comparability in terms of stance. Moving on to Swedish literature, Lars Borin and Dimitrios Kokkinakis (University of Gothenburg) report on their work in literary onomastics – namely, the development of a system which allows users to gather several important background information as regards names mentioned in literary works. The authors also discuss the research possibilities which are opened

up with the application of language technology to the literary field. Finally, Bill Louw (University of Zimbabwe) shifts the perspective to a more lexical/semantical one by analyzing word patterning as, for instance, that of ‘day’ in Philip Larkin’s poetry. In his chapter, he points out how collocations may be used to enhance one’s understanding of literature.

The second part of the book is dedicated to the education of literature students or, from a more general standpoint, readers. It consists of three chapters, ranging from a product-based approach to a process-based one. Opening this part, Stefan Hofer, René Bauer and Imre Hofmann (University of Zurich) explain how they have devised tEXtMACHINA, an e-learning environment which has been developed to account for the particularities of the literary field. The chapter also reports on the experience of using this web-based environment to enhance the possibilities of German literature teaching in the Switzerland context. In the following chapter, Jon Saklofske (Acadia University) also deals with the teaching of literature at universities. However, in this case, the author goes on to propose that games should be integrated in pedagogical practice. To this end, the chapter provides an overview of the technological tool the author designed as well as a detailed account of how it has been used in the Canadian setting. The educational part closes with William L. Heller (Teaching Matters) extending the discussion of literature teaching to the regular school background. Drawing on the concepts of the zone of proximal development and multiple intelligences, the author makes a case for teaching Shakespearean texts as early as possible. To illustrate his proposal, the chapter comments on and analyzes a real three-phase experience of teaching Shakespeare’s to fifth-graders at a school in New York City.

Closing the present volume, David Miall (University of Alberta) invites readers to embark on his dream of a literary machine. This innovation, which is unfortunately unavailable to date, aims at encompassing several features to help enhance one’s experience of literature reading. Miall’s proposal is clearly illustrated by means of Coleridge’s poetry, and its application to research and teaching are highlighted in the afterword.

All in all, the volume offers a survey of the potentials of inviting technological innovation to the realm of literary research/education. This survey is inherently brief, as the area still lacks more solid production into the confluence of technology and literature. Ultimately, we hope the present book contributes to a change of attitude and a new way of using technology in education.

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