Letras Hispanas
Volume 11, 2015

TITLE: From the Novel to Digital Storytelling: Dialogue, Identity, and the Fictionalization of Reality

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ABSTRACT: Throughout history, societies have been compelled to narrate and fictionalize their life experiences; and over the centuries, technological advances have evolved alongside developments in narrative communication. By situating the relevance of today's digital media in light of the emergence of the early modern novel during the Spanish Golden Age, this article offers a historical perspective on the effects of media technologies on storytelling. Through Mikhail Bakthin's concept of dialogism, we can situate Miguel de Cervantes's experimentations with the novelistic discourse within a framework that helps us explore issues of identity, communication, and self-realization in narrative forms. This process, in turn, helps us to understand how today's media have transformed the way reality is communicated through storytelling and how its affordances allow us to be immersed in infinite dialogues with others.

KEYWORDS: Miguel de Cervantes, Novel, Mikhail Bakhtin, Dialogism, Digital Storytelling, Identity

RESUMEN: A lo largo de la historia, las sociedades han manifestado una inclinación a narrar y novelar sus experiencias de vida; y durante siglos, los avances tecnológicos han ido mano a mano con el desarrollo de la comunicación narrativa. Este artículo se propone ofrecer una perspectiva histórica sobre los efectos que las tecnologías de la comunicación mediática han tenido en el terreno de la narración; con este objetivo se realiza un contraste entre el papel que los medios de comunicación digital están teniendo actualmente en relación con la emergencia de nuevas formas de narración, y el rol que la prensa moderna tuvo en la aparición de la novela moderna temprana durante el Siglo de Oro español. Apoyándome en el concepto de dialogismo de Mijaíl Bajtín, me propongo situar las experimentaciones de Miguel de Cervantes con el discurso novelesco dentro de un marco que nos ayude a explorar cuestiones relacionadas con la identidad, la comunicación y la autorrealización dentro del discurso narrativo. Este proceso, a su vez, nos ayudará a entender cómo los medios de comunicación de hoy en día han transformado la forma en que la realidad es representada a través del arte narrativo y cómo los recursos ofrecidos por la comunicación digital nos permiten participar en ambientes más inmersivos, que facilitan la articulación de diálogos infinitos con otros usuarios.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Miguel de Cervantes, novela, Mikhail Bakhtin, dialogismo, narrativa digital, identidad

BIOGRAPHY: Sarah Gretter is a Ph.D. candidate in the department of Educational Psychology & Educational Technology at Michigan State University. Her research focuses on Media & information literacy, and more particularly on the competencies that individuals should acquire to successfully understand the functions of media and digital storytelling in our 21st century lives. Her work is informed by her background in education as well as in literary studies.

From the Novel to Digital Storytelling: Dialogue, Identity, and the Fictionalization of Reality

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"Study the past if you would define the future"
Confucius

From cave paintings to today's digital media, human cultures have been compelled to narrate their life experiences. Over the centuries, technological advances have paralleled the expansion of communication and the evolution of narrative genres, as well as the ways we conceptualize the world around us (Boyd 123). By situating the relevance of today's online communication systems (i.e. blogs, digital media, social networks) in light of the emergence of the novel during the Spanish Golden Age, we can shed light on the affordances of media technologies for 21st century storytelling. Throughout this essay, the terms digital media, new media, and online storytelling are used interchangeably with the concept of paperless texts, expressing the affordances of the Internet and technological advances in terms of narratives. Just as Miguel de Cervantes's innovations changed literary traditions, and the mass production of books transformed the definition of readership, the emergence of new modes of expressions in digital worlds has modified our relationship with texts. Of course, many questions arise when looking at storytelling in a hyper-connected world. Can paperless texts like blogs, posts on web sites, or even online comments be recognized as novelistic narratives? Where does the boundary between reality and fiction lie in paperless texts? What makes sharing stories online, reading others' posts, and commenting on pictures so engrossing? And how does our participation in online narratives affect our status as "storytelling animals"? (Gottschall 177).

Undeniably, 21st-century technologies are at the forefront of a new phase in communication, where texts are paperless, "clouds" have become repositories of stories, and anyone has the opportunity to become an author or to portray themselves as characters. But do we, like Cervantes's famous Don Quixote, live at the intersection of reality and fantasy in a world that is constantly reflecting how we perceive ourselves? Cervantes's expertise with the distinction between truth and fiction in the early modern era can reveal much about today's media landscape and about the nature of narrative discourse in our society. The present essay is a collection of thoughts intertwining personal observations on paperless texts with literary analyses on the emergence of the early modern novel.

Like the priest and the barber's comments on Cervantes's work during the *escrutinio* of Don Quixote's library, this essay "propone algo, y no concluye nada" [proposes something and concludes nothing] (Cervantes 164). I propose that while novels are still flourishing under digital forms (i.e. Kindle, tablets), online storytelling in the shape of digital media can be perceived as an organic development—a byproduct, one might say—of novelistic discourse. To explore this idea, I first describe how the Spanish Golden Age context provides a platform for understanding the gripping effects of digital media as narrative support in the 21st century. Then, through Bakthin's concepts of dialogism, I examine the crucial role that the novel played in making sense of the world in the

early modern period, to finally consider how novelistic discourses can inform the nature of our online interactions with textual information today. In a general sense, I posit that the diversity of voices that entered the novel through Cervantes's novelistic ventures and that organized itself into a literary structured system through time is also what makes today's online storytelling alive. Because paperless storytelling makes it more difficult to distinguish between what is reality and what is fiction, the multiplicity of dialogues existing on the Internet continues to fuel our relationship with narratives and propels us to read other's stories whether on blogs, social networks, or forums. Nonetheless, I also argue that our intrinsic interests are not as different as those that fascinated 17th-century Spanish readerships.

Cervantes and the early modern novel

Much like Internet communication, the early modern novel emerged at a time of intense cultural and intellectual production, with the printing press facilitating the mass production of books across Europe (Fischer 205). As a product of its cultural and technological environment, the novel showcased features that attracted an increasingly growing readership. According to 20th century Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin, the European Renaissance saw the emergence of new forms and new types of novels that would give rise to the early modern novel in the Baroque period. He argued that those novels "paved the way for the novel's appropriation of that world, a world in which simultaneously America was being discovered, a sea route to India was being opened up, new fields in natural science and mathematics were being established" (*Dialogic* 166). Similar to today's globalization through the digitalization of information, the novel transformed traditional views of texts and familiar definitions of communication. In chapter 62, of *Don Quixote* Book II, the Spanish knight

visits a printing press in Barcelona that is producing the pirated edition of his adventures. This encounter makes him reflect on his existence as character, but also makes him think about the power of technology to disseminate information, as well as the commercial nature of the printing press itself. As a result, this scene is the quintessence of Cervantes's skillful analysis of the contradictory effects of modernity on reality in a world where fiction was produced and distributed on a large scale. Indeed, the scene resonates with the feeling that technology allowed the modern individual to possess an infinite access to knowledge, yet that this sense of freedom was a controlled by how technology and its owners shaped said knowledge before diffusing it to the masses.

Cervantes himself is the epitome of different worldviews, as he witnessed the transition between two historical times, each with its own preoccupations and innovations. His work was thoroughly saturated by his culture and every aspect of it was reflected in his thoughts about the socio-cultural elements that influenced him and his contemporaries (Castro *Pensamiento* 23). For Bakhtin too, the historical era that witnessed the emergence of the novel was one that modeled such genre into a new literary form, contrary to other established genres that were carried over from previous generations as "fixed forms." (*Dialogic* 4). Cervantes's experimentation with those previously-established genres, like the pastoral novel, was a product of both his environment and mindset; and his experiences, in turn, permanently changed story-writing by integrating human psychology, emotions, and social reality in fictional worlds. Building upon his literary inheritance of the pastoral genre, Cervantes learned to manipulate characters' emotions into his unique novelistic technique (Riley 34). Such fictionalization of life was possible thanks to Cervantes's rendition of characters' psyche and their struggles with social reality into readable emotions. From don Quixote to Auristela, from Anselmo to Preciosa and the *viejo celoso*, Cervantes's characters brought life to storytelling by presenting their internal struggles with

others through internal dialogues and public discourses.

As a matter of fact, Bakhtin posits that the main characteristic of the novel is indeed its heteroglossia—its inclusion of others' speeches—along with their socio-ideological implications, voices, styles, and assumptions (*Dialogic* 411). Dialogue, in Bakthin's views, not only reveals the unique exchange between languages in the novel, but also highlights our intrinsic need for otherness in hybrid narrative forms. For Bakhtin "of such sort is the classic and purest model of the novel as genre—Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, which realizes in itself, in extraordinary depth and breadth, all the artistic possibilities of heteroglot and internally dialogized novelistic discourse" (*Dialogic* 323-324). Cervantes opened existing narrative structures to a multiplicity of voices that each brought their stories to life and resonated with characters and readers alike. Don Quixote discovered his identity as a character through his interactions with other characters in the book, and it is this co-construction of knowledge that allowed him to question his existence in relation to the readership that brought him to life. And by becoming observers of characters' internal dilemmas and interactions with others, Cervantes's readers also added their voices to this interconnected system of discourse.

Lisa Zunshine explains that it is our Theory of Mind that helps us as readers to discover the ways individuals interact" (24). Theory of Mind is the ability to recognize that people other than ourselves also have mental states such as thoughts, desires and beliefs about the world. Such interaction is essential to the conduct of everyday life in social contexts: for instance, when one predicts what someone will do, or explains why they have done something, one demonstrates Theory of Mind processes (Frith 644). When we read different types of texts, we apply our capacity to attribute mental states to either literary characters, real persons or represented agents; we bring them to life, we mentally create them and give them opportunities to express themselves while activating and practicing important cognitive aptitudes. According to Zunshine, reading is actually a mind-reading game where the reader learns from the characters' mistakes, emotions, and preoccupations (24). She describes how "our Theory of Mind makes it possible for us to invest literary characters with a potential for a broad array of thoughts, desires, intentions, and feelings […] and predict their behavior" (60). This capacity is one that Cervantes infused in his craft by describing characters that felt human, like us. In fact, Alban Forcione demonstrated that:

> Cervantes's fascination with the effects of literature on behavior is evident throughout his works, and, while he can deplore the disruptive and debasing power of bad fiction, he was plainly far more interested in its victims than in those who would shy away from any experience of the alluring world of the literary imagination. There is a lifelessness in his nonreaders and in his fastidious selective readers that clearly suggests that for him the act of reading or listening to literature is a sign of vitality and openness to development as a human being. As Américo Castro has shown in various illuminating studies of the *Quixote*, the 'reader' for Cervantes is, like the lover, a person who is willing to endure the excitement and the perils of seeing beyond, and perhaps stepping beyond the world of habit, ritual, and mechanism that accounts for so much of our daily experience. (90-91)

Cervantes's readers are invited to decide what to think of his stories and characters, and it is once the readers fill the gaps of his narrative that communication is fully achieved. As Wolfgang Iser pointed out, textual communication is not a regulated process but rather an interaction between what is implicit in the

text and how the reader responds to it to create meaning (111). The emergence of the novel as reflected through Cervantes's depiction of characters' minds opened a dialogue with readers, which was unprecedented. Along with the mass production and diffusion of books throughout Europe, Cervantes's innovations therefore shaped both the content and the form of his narratives. This combination of technological and artistic advances consequently transformed the ways readers perceived and connected with texts; an evolution that altered traditional views of readers' role in the narrative process, one that is still in motion today.

Reading through the centuries

Steven R. Fischer, in *A History of Reading*, reminds us that medieval dogmatic reading was two-dimensional, composed only of the acts of listening and reading. However, the invention of the printing press, considered by Fischer "one of the world's greatest social and intellectual ruptures" (205), created not only a transformation of reading practices but also of European society itself. Although the hierarchy continued to be one of *author-commentator- bishop- teacher- pupil* until the end of the fifteenth century where the reader was a passive listener who was given an interpretation to follow, the second half of the fifteenth century witnessed readers becoming more responsible for their reading, thus evolving into more active respondents in the process (Fischer 205). The teaching that was explicitly given through oral literacy to audiences slowly became internal to each individual reader; and with independent reading also came a certain independence of thought. Fischer adds that as a consequence, the concept of books also changed. There was not a "correct" way of reading anymore, but a plurality of individual interpretations. He states that "the reader, no longer the text, was the fulcrum of knowledge" (219). Readers' voices

thus became an essential part of the construction of the narrative experience, as they became responsible for independently creating meaning simply from words on a page.

Concordantly, Bakhtin agrees that the era of the Renaissance opened up the closed up and centralized structure of the Middle Ages due to discoveries in many domains of knowledge (*Dialogic* 415). Such transitions shifted many boundaries, and for him, this expression of change could only surface through the novelistic discourse. The new discoveries and inventions of that period set the background for understanding Cervantes's ability to express contemporary concerns from his unique perspective on individual struggles in an increasingly expanding society. Indeed, Cervantes's characters fully express themselves along with the preoccupations of their time, disclosing that "what was particularly needed for the growth of literary 'self-consciousness' as we find it in Cervantes's novels was for writers to make their characters detach themselves from, and comment on, stories or verses included in the same book," argues Edward Riley (33). As characters became more independent within their story worlds, readers also became more independent to interpret and read those worlds as their own. This process, in turn, is what made the second half of the seventeenth century see the act of reading as "society's most important medium for accessing knowledge" (Fischer 251). Being able, as readers, to see how society was changing under their own eyes, would allow them to see how the distortion of reality could impact characters. By offering alternatives to reality in his writings, Cervantes forced readers to think about their own reality as well.

But Cervantes did not only write his novels for a consumer audience, he also actively explored "the implicit constraints on literary representations of subjectivity in ways that reveal a much deeper awareness of the existential predicament of the modern individual" (Gilbert-Santamaría 151). In

other words, Cervantes simultaneously created characters that the reader could judge, and characters that possessed that same self-consciousness as well. By reflecting on the human condition, subjectivity therefore entered his fictional worlds as much as it pervaded the readers' own realities. Iser's work sheds light on what happens between a text and a reader when such phenomenon occurs. According to him, a text becomes a story only when a reader is making sense of it (3). He explains in more detail that:

> A text that lays things out before the reader in such a way that he can either accept or reject them will lessen the degree of participation, as it allows him nothing but a yes or no. Texts with such minimal indeterminacy tend to be tedious, for it is only when the reader is given the chance to participate actively that he will regard the text whose intention he himself has helped to compose, as real. For we generally tend to regard things that we have made ourselves as being real. (*Prospecting* 10)

By becoming an active participant in the meaning-making process, the reader therefore holds the final outcome of the text, whether fictional or not. This open-endedness is only possible thanks to the presence of the multiple voices that compose it and the dialogue that happens in and out the story world, much like the micro-network of stories that we experience with today's proliferation of interconnected narratives on the online stage.

Certainly, digital media have transformed the way reality is communicated through narratives and how audiences respond to what they read and how they interpret others' minds. In addition, recent technologies have merged the visual with the auditory and the textual, giving individuals the agency to become their own author—or even character—in multimodal environments. Much as in the 17th century, readers are still enthralled by looking into other people's minds, their thoughts, their emotions, their struggles, their opinions, as well as their life experiences. Whether on Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, or LinkedIn, we are curious about others' whereabouts, we read about new experiences, and seek to align our understanding of the world with other perspectives. Looking at the elements that propelled the novel on the forefront of the literary scene therefore helps us to understand the nature of digital media as readable narratives on a globalized scale. The independence of thought that was introduced to readers through the novelistic genre has now stretched to readers' purposeful inclusion in the process. Readers can now be writers, commentators, critics, or simple observers. Henry Jenkins reminds us that in today's culture, consumers' participation in media diffusion is the most active part of narratives' constructions, as they shape the convergence of narrative interests online (4). Indeed, when we are online, we are free to decide what to read, where and when to share stories, and we can be as passive or active as we wish. This freedom in our interaction with online narratives is unique to our contemporary context, and it is expanding our notion of readership to new ways of responding to information in multimodal ways. According to J. David Bolter and Richard Grusin, we, as readers of paperless texts, use media to define our individual and cultural identity alike (231). Like Cervantes, we are now the ones standing in the middle of the printing house (i.e. the Internet), wondering about how others perceive us, how words can define who we are, and how modernity is shaping our reality in a digital world that merges the factual with the fictional on a daily basis. As we contemplate our identity in this online profusion of stories, we need to remember, like Don Quixote, that those texts only exist because we infuse meaning into them.

Dialogism and new media

Together, the author, the characters and the readers form a unity that brings a text to life. In other words, it is mostly through others' voices and dialogues that we can understand intentions and meanings hidden between the lines of a text. In *The Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics,* Bakhtin attributes one of the characteristics of the early modern novel to the importance of voices carried by characters as fully autonomous entities, in opposition to traditional works where the hero's views were an objectified whole. As a result, Bakhtin noticed that the latter approach is incapable of projecting the world of other people's consciousnesses, and therefore represents a single worldview, a monologic framework without concrete consciousness of characters and interactions between them (9). In a more polyphonic world with a diversity of point of views, however, characters' voices are extended to the readers, who complete the story by interjecting their own voice. And this is what Cervantes does best; he leaves the last word to the reader by keeping his stories open-ended and by obscuring the boundary between reading for entertainment and reading for self-development. For Dominick Finello, this combination of leisure and literacy in the time of Cervantes:

> gives rise to a progressively stepped-up exercise of telling and learning, a pastime that makes *Don Quijote* possible and plays a pivotal role in the development of the modern novel: people now want not only to enjoy intriguing tales but wish, further, to acquaint themselves with the figures in them or narrating them. As a result, psychological awareness sharpens in genres like the pastoral, where it eventually rises to a level comparable with that of the *Quijote*. Perhaps the arrival of the mass production of books is indirectly responsible for the elevated level of self-consciousness in the *Quijote* and other sixteenth-century genres. (20)

The production of texts for a large market, along with the emergence of novelistic discourse therefore bolstered a newly acquired awareness in reading processes. As readers became more active in their interpretation of widely distributed texts, they could discuss and share opinions about their reading experiences with, through, and about texts.

Though different in purpose, paperless texts replicate the interiority of that novelistic discourse, and today's technology makes it easy to access a wide variety of texts. In this essay, paperless texts refer to any digital communication allowing users to share their personal stories, thoughts, or ideas through various forms of media including but not limited to text, video, sounds, animations and photographs. Following N. Katherine Hayles's reflections on new media, paperless texts can be considered hybrid in nature, while encompassing many narrative genres (4). With a click, we have access to other people's minds; we can share stories and participate in online narratives of culture. We can also express our emotions with emoticons, and can choose the length and type of communication we desire to use. Certainly, one could argue that today's digital storytelling is a far stretch from Cervantes's art; yet, if we approach the novel like Bakhtin does, that is, as a "genre-in-the-making," we can look at online popular stories, networking, and blogging under those principles. Indeed, Bakhtin defined the novel as a genre that always continues to develop, in comparison to other literary genres that are already completely formed (*Dialogic* 11). For him, novelized texts,

> become more free and flexible, their language renews itself by incorporating extraliterary heteroglossia and the "novelistic" layers of literary language, they become dialogized, permeated with laughter, irony, humor, elements of self-parody and finally— this is the most important thing—the novel inserts into these other genres an indeterminacy, a certain semantic openendedness, a living contact with unfinished, still evolving contemporary reality. (*Dialogic* 7)

Could it be that digital storytelling is an after-effect of the novelization of genres? That the openendedness of the Internet has created a new platform for an incredible multiplicity of voices, fostering a heteroglossia specific only to the 21st century? Aren't the dialogues we see online composed of laughter, self-parody, and reflections on our continually evolving reality, like the examples Bakhtin describes? Paperless narratives are hybrid forms of narratives that can sometimes blur the boundaries between facts and fiction; as we can share stories using different profiles, present only one side of our personality, or altogether write under different aliases. The Internet allows us to filter how we act, what we tell, and how we respond to what we see online. Not only have texts become paperless, but they have also become multimodal, allowing for even more voices to join the polyphony of the World Wide Web. However, while the medium changes, I believe that what draws us to digital stories still is our fascination with real people and their characterization. What paperless texts allow—particularly thanks to the Internet—is for the proliferation of "self-representational stories" which allow users to take advantage of the narrative affordances of technology to express themselves and read others' narratives (Lundby 105). Cervantes created human-like characters that drew readers to them, and today we fictionalize ourselves to interact with others. Paperless narratives have opened dialogic discourse to its uttermost possibility, and are challenging our perceptions of individual identity in a society where our online stories define how others view our offline personality.

Technology, modernity, and identity

Osvaldo Cleger states that the performative and dramaturgic act of our online participation with texts is due to the mediated nature of online interactions and the availability of manipulation tools (i.e. Photoshop, avatars, text edits, etc.) (131-132). In this performance lies a fascinating collinearity between modernity and identity; it is as if technology is simultaneously a tool that we master and employ to present ourselves, and a controlling device that is shaping our identity at the same time. Don Quixote embodied those contradictions: he was a character that fought modernity, he was a product of its technological advances, and he acquired self-awareness while reading books produced by the printing press the he despised at the same time (Jaksic 77). Don Quixote was against modernity and yet needed it to construct his identity. Throughout *Don Quixote*, Cervantes highlighted these effects of the printing press on society and on human subjectivity. As Ivan Jaksic has noted:

> The numerous references to books in general, and romances of chivalry in particular, reveal Cervantes' awareness of the impact of technology on human sensibility. He created a character that became paradigmatic of the transition from *Reconquista* to modern times in Spain, and in the process commented on the shock of the new as represented by the technology of print. The presence of the book is so pervasive in *Don Quijote* that without it one cannot understand either the motivations of the character, or the purpose of the novel. (87)

The mutual influence between technology, modernity, and individual development is seen throughout Cervantes's novel and is essential to the creation of his characters' identities. This idea of self-construction through others is echoed by Bakhtin, who explains in *Problems of Speech Genres* that one realizes himself through the interaction with others, and that others help building one's personal identity (138). Others' voices and the dialogue between them help make sense of one's existence. To Bakhtin, "to be means to communicate" (*Dostoevsky* 287). One becomes

oneself through the interaction with others; without such response, one can feel empty and without purpose. Additionally, in *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*, Bakhtin also referred to a model of the human mind based on "I-for myself," "I-for-the-other" and "other-for-me." Bakhtin argued there that it is mainly through the "I-for-the-other" that we build an identity, through the ways others view us (16). This need for others is of even greater importance when considering the effect of online communication on identity construction in the parallel between novelistic and digital discourse.

Hubert Hermans' theory of the dialogical self was informed by Bakhtin's literary analysis along with William James' psychology theories. The dialogical self, for Herman, represents the tension between internal and external dialogues in and with the self. He argues that globalization is a causal factor in the way we consider relationships between individuals, groups and cultures along with relationships within the multiple voices of the self (22). The presence of both the local and the global in modern societies is what fosters a "multi-voiced and dialogical self" as modernity exposes us more to others and to our own self at the same time (Herman 29). The self parallels the world in which it evolves, therefore the more globalized it is on the outside, the more globalized it will be on the inside as well (31). The concept of self that Herman puts forward aligns with our discussion of modernity and identity, both in how Don Quixote experienced it with the printing press, and in how we are witnessing it with digital media. The self-awareness developed by the Spanish knight is the embodiment of our interaction with new media. Don Quixote famously stated "sé quién soy" [I know who I am] (Cervantes 162), and like him, we construct our identity by interacting with others' words and by shaping our own life stories. Interestingly, in chapter 3 of Book II of *Don Quixote*, the Úbeda painter illustrates this point, by saying that "así debe de ser mi historia, que tendrá necesidad de comento

para entenderla" [and that must be how my history is: a commentary will be necessary in order to understand it] (Cervantes 334). And such are our own stories, constantly created, shared, and commented upon through different media.

Concluding thoughts

Jonathan Gottschall refers to human beings as "storytelling animals," reminding us that no matter the era or the medium, our lives are always saturated with narratives (xvii). From television to books and social media, we crave a sense of connection in a hyperlinked world. Our intrinsic need for stories is driving technology as much as technology is shaping it, thus constantly changing our definitions of narratives, authorship, and literacy. According to the Digital Storytelling Association,

> digital storytelling is the modern expression of the ancient art of storytelling. Throughout history, storytelling has been used to share knowledge, wisdom, and values. Stories have taken many different forms. Stories have been adapted to each successive medium that has emerged, from the circle of the campfire to the silver screen, and now the computer screen. (para. 1)

Contemporary scholarship in various fields is looking at new media, online narratives and digital literacies as venues to explore the ways we learn, read and write through multimodal stories. To respond to this new reality, both Cleger and Gottschall have called for interdisciplinary work in the study of multiliteracies in order to provide an in-depth understanding of our interaction with ever-evolving media. Along the same line, media specialist Renee Hobbs asserted that digital literacy comprises the cognitive, emotional and social abilities that users display when interaction with a variety of digital narratives,

while demonstrating creativity, critical thinking, and collaboration (17).

I propose here that in the current context of the crisis of the humanities in a technological era, literature actually has an essential role to play in understanding how and why digital storytelling is prevalent in our culture. Digital literacy is an extension of literary discourses as well as a natural progression in the evolution of literary genres. The image of Don Quixote is cyclically relevant to make sense of the nature of our synergy with reality and fiction. De facto, Bakhtin explained this phenomenon as "re-accentuation," the continuous exploration of symbols, concepts, ideas and structures through the evolution of literary genres. He believed that:

> The list of subsequent re-accentuation of images in a given novel—say, the image of Don Quixote—takes on an enormous heuristic significance, deepening and broadening our artistic and ideological understanding of them. For, we repeat, great novelistic images continue to grow and develop even after the moment of their creation; they are capable of being creatively transformed in different eras, far distant from the day and hour of their original birth. (*Dialogic* 422)

For the Russian philosopher, re-accentuations are fundamental in the history of narratives; and every era re-accentuates its most immediate and significant works. Thanks to this process, literary works continue to grow, and to re-create themselves.

The image of Don Quixote and his story thus continues to inform us about the nature of fiction and the essence of dialogue in the novel even today. Teaching Spanish literature in the 21st century helps us to not only make sense of our literary past, but also to understand our narrative present. Teaching literature allows us to open the dialogue around texts and to act on their open-endedness. If we view the role of teaching literature as a way to help students understand how narratives shape the self, then, the processes that emerge from the relation between technology, narratives, identity, and dialogue could enhance students' capacities for communication both in academic and social settings. This process, in turn, could allow for the emergence of new identities and forms of expressions, as advocated by Claire Taylor and Thea Pitman (266). Communication and dialogue are essential competences in a world of socio-cultural contexts that are far more open and global than they used to be. Being flexible, empathetic, and open to other perspectives are skills that students need if they wish to succeed in today's hyper-connected society. As literary animals, studying the past to understand the future is not just a matter of reading anymore, but a way to incorporate one additional voice, one new tale, in the long history of our vivid relationship with storytelling.

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