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**Paperless Text: Digital Storytelling
in Latin America and Spain
(1976-2016)**

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ABSTRACT: In this special issue of *Letras Hispanas* we bring together a collection of interventions that illustrate a variety of ways of approaching digital storytelling, from multidisciplinary perspectives, by a new generation of scholars working on this field. While the contributions to this special issue vary considerably in terms of the primary materials they analyze and the critical approaches they employ, there are several identifiable tendencies that allow us to divide these interventions into three major trajectories. A first set of articles deals with the evolving relationship between electronic narrative and print media, analyzing examples of crossover between the two spheres. A second trajectory among the contributions to this volume examines specific digital media technologies and the new genres and modes of expression they have engendered. The third and final set of contributions focuses on the ways digital communities and social networks have impacted literary practice and creative expression in the Spanish-speaking world.

KEYWORDS: Digital Storytelling, Digital Media, E-Literature, E-Genres, Social Networks, Latin America, Spain

RESUMEN: Este número especial de *Letras Hispanas* recoge un conjunto de contribuciones que sirven para ilustrar una variedad de acercamientos a la narrativa en formato digital, desde perspectivas multidisciplinares, por una nueva generación de investigadores que se desempeñan dentro de este campo. Si bien es cierto que los aportes aquí incluidos difieren considerablemente en lo que respecta a los materiales analizados y las metodologías empleadas en cada estudio, es asimismo posible identificar varias tendencias que nos permiten dividir estas contribuciones en tres trayectorias fundamentales. Un primer conjunto de artículos se ocupa de examinar la relación siempre cambiante entre la narrativa electrónica y los medios de comunicación impresos, analizando ejemplos de cruce entre las dos esferas. Una segunda trayectoria examina algunas TICs específicas y los nuevos géneros y modos de expresión que las mismas han engendrado. El tercer y último conjunto de contribuciones se centra en explorar la manera en que las comunidades digitales y las redes sociales han impactado las prácticas literarias y el trabajo creativo en el mundo de habla española.

PALABRAS CLAVE: narrativa digital, medios digitales de comunicación, literatura electrónica, géneros, redes sociales, América Latina, España

BIOGRAPHY: Osvaldo Cleger is Assistant Professor of Spanish in the School of Modern Languages at the Georgia Institute of Technology. His current research focuses on the impact that recent technological developments have on the cultural, pedagogical and literary fields. His book *Narrar en la era de las blogoficciones: literatura, cultura y sociedad de las redes en el siglo XXI (The Art of Narrating in the Age of Blog-fictions)* offers a systematic approach to blog-narratives written by Hispanic authors. He has also co-edited two collective volumes on Hypertext theory and pedagogy in the Hispanic world: *Redes hipertextuales en el aula*, Octaedro 2015, and *Formación literaria, hipertextos y Web 2.0 en el marco educativo*, Editorial Universidad de Almería, 2015.

Phillip Penix-Tadsen (PhD, Columbia University) is a specialist in contemporary Latin American cultural studies. His first book, *Cultural Code: Video Games and Latin America* (MIT Press, 2016), brings together the critical vocabularies of game studies and Latin American cultural studies to offer a synthetic theorization of the relationship between video games and culture, based on analysis of both in-game cultural representation and the real-life economic, political and societal effects of games.

Digital Storytelling in Latin America and Spain (1976-2016)

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Phillip Penix-Tadsen, University of Delaware

Digital storytelling takes on many forms in Spain and Latin America. Starting from the very advent of electronic media, the regions' hackers, programmers, authors and artists have created a spectrum of multimedia literary and poetic projects that represent a diverse array of approaches, concerns, traditions, and innovations. Currently, as countries on both sides of the Atlantic report triple-digit annual growth in e-book sales and increased time spent interacting with online media (Wischenbart et al., 2014), the populations of Latin America and Spain are investing more time and energy into consuming and creating content for tablets and other digital devices, from personal computers to smartphones to video game consoles. As texts go paperless and digital storytelling gains prominence, our concepts regarding the nature of narrative discourse are being challenged in fundamental ways, from our notions of what constitutes a *text*, to the contextual meaning of semiotic or literary devices, to models of narrative structure and authorship, to concepts of readership, distribution, and consumption of literary works.

While the hastening spread of new media technology throughout Latin America and Spain is a relatively recent phenomenon, e-reading and digital storytelling are as old as the first personal computers that entered global markets in the mid-1970s. Scholars commonly refer to the late 1980s and early 1990s as the dawn of digital storytelling, with the publication of some of the earliest works of hypertext fiction, such as Michael Joyce's *afternoon, a story* (1987) or Colombian-born author Juan B. Gutiérrez's earliest versions of *Extreme Conditions* (1996). However taking

into account that interactive fiction had preceded hypertext fiction by at least a decade, with the earliest example, William Crowther's *Colossal Cave Adventure*, appearing in 1976, and *Don Quijote, La Aventura* being released in Spain by Dinamic Software in 1987, it is possible to conclude that digital storytelling has in fact been present for even longer.

Since 2000, the proliferation of social networks, online literary and cultural publications, blogs, and e-books—along with the mobile devices that make all of these products legible—have made digital storytelling even more ubiquitous. Likewise, these new media bring with them new mechanisms of expression that open up a wide range of possibilities for experimenting with stories that not only combine text with sound and moving images, but that also incorporate such technologies as Google Maps, touch screens used for navigation or for triggering animation and effects, or tablets' GPS, camera, and audio capabilities to display an augmented reality layer embedded in the story. These and other contemporary transformations to the practices of reading and writing are expanding what authors can do—and what readers can experience—when it comes to digital storytelling.

In this special issue of *Letras Hispanas* we bring together a collection of interventions that illustrate a variety of ways of approaching digital storytelling, from multidisciplinary perspectives, by a new generation of scholars working on this field. Since the publication of what is possibly one of the earliest examples of scholarship on digital storytelling ever written, Jay David Bolter and Michael Joyce's conference paper "Hypertext

and Creative Writing,” presented at the first Association for Computing Machinery Conference on Hypertext (Chapel Hill 1987), much progress has been made in this emerging field. Research on digital storytelling and digital culture has gone from being an area mostly dominated by Anglo-American voices to becoming a more inclusive area of research, in which the contributions made by Latin Americanists and Hispanists, as well as by Spanish-speaking online communities, are playing an increasingly crucial role. Since early 2000, the collaboration between research institutions across the Atlantic has helped to broaden the approach to digital media. More specifically, the creation of the Barcelona-based research group Hermeneia and their active involvement with the Electronic Literature Organization in recent years has been crucial in bringing a more international perspective to digital media studies, as reflected in the inclusion of several Latin American and Spanish authors in the *Electronic Literature Collection*, Volume 2, published by ELO in 2011. In the UK, the Digital Latin American Cultures Network (previously known as the Latin American Cybercultural Studies project) has significantly contributed to the promotion of research in this field, both by hosting international conferences and editing collected anthologies and monographic publications on the topic, as well as by maintaining a constant exchange with other international scholars through their latamcyber mailing list. Through their *Hybrid Storyspaces* project, Christine Henseler and Debra Castillo have also furthered the interest in Latin American and Spanish digital cultures and literatures, at the same time they have managed to bring into the discussion the voices of several digital artists and practitioners from the region, including Edmundo Paz Soldán, Rosina Conde, Doménico Chappe, and Fran Illich, among others. South of the US-Mexico border, several Latin American institutions are becoming major hubs for innovation and

research in the broader field of digital humanities. Particularly noteworthy in this regard is the work conducted at the Universidad Javeriana in Bogotá under the leadership of Jaime Alejandro Rodríguez, who has not only been a pioneer when it comes to authoring narratives in digital format, but has also played a mayor role in furthering our understanding of digital storytelling through his scholarly contributions (Rodríguez Ruiz 1999).

More recent initiatives, such as the launching of a Latin American and Latino Digital Humanities/Cyberculture project at the University of Georgia, Athens, the Locative Media Learning Initiative at Georgia Tech, as well as currently ongoing talks about the creation of a Red de Literatura Electrónica Latinoamericana are equally promising developments in this regard. Finally, we would like to acknowledge the many valuable contributions made by the Spain-based research group FRAC (Formación Receptora y Análisis de Competencias), whose annual conferences on hypertext pedagogy and very active research track record on this topic (Mendoza Fillola 2012, Amo, Cleger & Mendoza Fillola 2015) have contributed to increased interest in digital storytelling, and its inclusion in curricular activities, not only among university professors and scholars, but also among K-12 teachers, educational policy makers and curriculum designers.

In terms of published research, the past decade has seen a veritable boom in scholarly production regarding digital media and culture in Latin America and Spain. Several notable examples focus specifically on the relationship between electronic media and creative expression, including Thea Pitman and Claire Taylor's book *Latin American Identity in Online Cultural Production*, Matthew Bush and Tania Gentic's edited anthology *Technology, Literature, and Digital Culture in Latin America: Mediatized Sensibilities in a Globalized Era*, Claire Taylor's *Place and Politics in Latin American Digital Culture: Location and*

Latin American Net Art, Christine Henseler's book *Spanish Fiction in the Digital Age: Generation X Remixed*, or the special issues "Literatura latinoamericana, española, portuguesa en la era digital (Nuevas tecnologías y lo literario)" published by the *Arizona Journal of Hispanic Cultural Studies* (2010) and "Narrar en la era digital" recently published in *Espéculo: Revista de Estudios Literarios* (2015). Others have examined the contexts of production, circulation, and consumption of computer hardware and software in different contexts throughout Latin America, including studies like Eden Medina's *Cybernetic Revolutionaries: Technology and Politics in Allende's Chile*, Cristina Venegas's *Digital Dilemmas: The State, the Individual, and Digital Media in Cuba*, Yuri Takhteyev's *Coding Places: Software Practice in a South American City*, and Anita Chan's *Networking Peripheries: Technological Futures and the Myth of Digital Universalism*. A number of recent scholarly anthologies have also shed light on the relationship between new media and culture in Latin America and Spain, including *Beyond Imported Magic: Essays on Science, Technology, and Society in Latin America*, edited by Eden Medina and Ivan da Costa Marques, as well as Mark J. P. Wolf's *Video Games Around the World*, which includes chapters on Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, Peru, Spain, Uruguay, and Venezuela. Given this expansion in the number of works focusing on new media and culture in Latin America and Spain, most of which focus on the social and technological aspects of digital culture, the time is ripe to deepen our discussions of the relationship between new media and production in poetry, fiction, and other narrative forms. The aim of this special issue is to add to discussions of electronic media and culture in Spain and Latin America by providing a varied spectrum of cultural contexts, critical methodologies, and historical

and contemporary case studies that together help diversify and expand our understanding of the intersections between storytelling and digital media.

As the contributions to this volume demonstrate, the manifestations of the relationship between electronic media and the narrative tradition are multivalent, wide-ranging, and highly varied. Not only have technological advances enabled new types of expression shaped by the parameters of evolving platforms and media, these technologies have simultaneously had a profound impact on the world of print literature. Likewise, social networks and online interactions have affected the way narrative is produced, circulated, consumed, and critiqued over the course of the past several decades, contributing to a continuing evolution in the relationship between authors and their audiences. The articles collected in this special issue give testimony to the many intersections between narrative and digital media in the Spanish-speaking world, offering insight into the cultural impact of new media in diverse contexts throughout Latin America and Spain.

While the contributions to this special issue vary considerably in terms of the primary materials they analyze and the critical approaches they employ, there are several identifiable tendencies that allow us to divide these interventions into three major trajectories. A first set of articles deals with the evolving relationship between electronic narrative and print media, analyzing examples of crossover between the two spheres. For example, Sarah Gretter examines how transformations in narrative and fictional conventions have historically been tied to evolutions in communication media. Gretter offers a comparative analysis between the advent of digital narrative and the emergence of the early modern novel during the Golden Age in Spain, using Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of dialogism as a

framework for exploring the relationship between communication, identity, and self-realization in narratives across the ages. For her part, Carolina Gainza examines the establishment of a “digital aesthetic” identifiable in the works of two contemporary Chilean authors, exploring the ways Carlos Labbé’s hypertextual narratives and Jorge Baradit’s print publications both respond to the contemporary mediascape. Gainza demonstrates the ways in which these authors’ creative practices, along with the circulation and consumption of their works, has been transformed by their relationship to digital media and social networks. In a final contribution to this focus on the relationship between print and electronic media, Alexandra Saum-Pascual examines two manifestations of computational practices and electronic literature in print form from Spain in an analysis that advocates for an expanded definition of electronic literature to include not only “born-digital” works but also those that incorporate the aesthetic and procedural practices of digital media into texts published in print. Saum-Pascual’s examination of Vicente Luis Mora’s *Alba Cromm* and Javier Fernández’s *Cero absoluto* demonstrates the ways in which their media-informed literary practices constitute a rejection of the literary canon. Together, these contributions demonstrate the ways that transformations in narrative conventions and literary practices have traditionally been tied to successive waves of technology, offering much-needed historical perspective for the analysis of more recent intersections between literature and media.

A second trajectory among the contributions to this volume examines specific digital media technologies and the new genres and modes of expression they have engendered. Osvaldo Cleger delivers a thorough review of four decades of cyberliterature in Latin America, analyzing how literary genres and practices have been transformed by the expansion in textual forms and hybrid means of expression. Cleger goes on to review and categorize many of the major genres of electronic poetry and narrative that have emerged

in the region from the 1970s to the present, offering a nuanced overview of a wide range of digital literary works. Focusing on yet another electronic medium of expression, Phillip Penix-Tadsen discusses the role of written text in contemporary video games designed in Latin America, showing that in spite of the necessity to examine electronic media in terms of their uniqueness and specificity, textual and narrative analytical frameworks retain an important role in our understanding of the products of digital culture. Looking at a number of recent examples from game designers throughout the region, Penix-Tadsen shows a broad array of reactions and responses to narrative conventions and textual modes of expression in contemporary Latin American video games. Contributions like these help explain how the mechanics and technical specifications of different media forms contribute to their meaning in processes that are related to and intertwined with narrative expression, but whose meaning cannot be deduced from a narrative interpretation alone.

The third and final set of contributions focuses on the ways digital communities and social networks have impacted literary practice and creative expression in the Spanish-speaking world. Sarah Lowman and Luis Correa-Díaz offer an examination of how the phenomenon known as “Twitter Fiction” has been developed by Spanish and Latin American authors working within the narrative confines of a 140-character limit. Correa-Díaz and Lowman’s analysis focuses on both works published on electronic platforms like Twitter as well as print works composed of tweeted text, offering crucial insight into the development of a new literary genre spawned from the social media technologies of our time. In his article, Marcos Wasem discusses the project *Ya te conté. Encuentros sobre narrativas recientes del Río de la Plata*, a program supported by the Uruguayan Ministry of Education and Culture that involved a collaboration between contemporary writers from Uruguay and Argentina in a series of open encounters aimed at nurturing critical

reflection on contemporary narrative. Wasem analyzes this “incipient and local digital humanities practice” as a way of connecting with the broader public and breaking with a view of literature as a sacred and elite realm, offering insights into the ways electronic media affect the environment for critical reflection on literary works and authors. Finally, Ana Patricia Rodríguez explores the relationship between digital media, the migrant experience, and pedagogy in an article based on her project “Entre Mundos / Between Worlds: Digital Stories of Salvadoran Transnational Migration,” which was exhibited in 2014 at the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian. In this project, Rodríguez had students compile images, sounds, and oral narratives from thirty-five Salvadoran migrant families, in a demonstration of the ways the tools of digital storytelling can be used to highlight stories of transnationality and the experiences of migration. Together, these three articles demonstrate the different ways in which digital media can function as a democratizing force for culture, bringing new communities and practices to bear on the literary canon and developing ways of telling stories that were previously unheard.

About a decade ago, when many of the scholars included or mentioned in this collection were exploring the field of Hispanic digital culture and literature for the first time, their interest was often met with skepticism by other colleagues and peers from their institutions. Academic journals at the time very rarely published articles on the subject; books on digital culture from Spain and Latin America were rare, and academic conference organizers would often raise their eyebrows when they were presented with a panel proposal focused on the growing corpus of artistic and literary forms created by digital artists and writers from the region. Thankfully, nowadays that perception has changed dramatically. The corpus of research on digital media production in Latin America and Spain has grown exponentially, to the point that the challenge for scholars conducting research

in this field is not anymore to find valuable information on any particular topic, but to be able to keep up with everything that is being published at an increasingly rapid rate. This year alone, at least two peer-edited journals have dedicated a special issue to digital storytelling in the Spanish-speaking world. As a clear sign of a healthy growth within the field, in every new published collection of essays readers can usually find both some of the names already established through their previous work and some new refreshing voices that have recently joined this ongoing conversation.

In this regard, this special issue of *Letras Hispanas* is representative of the current state of research on digital storytelling in the Hispanic world. It includes contributions made by established as well as emerging voices; it deals with some mostly unexplored topics (such as Latin American videogames or geolocate narratives) at the same time it revisits more traditional ones (such as Hypertext fiction and online literary production) with the hope of shedding new light on them; it looks at digital storytelling from a scholarly perspective as well as a pedagogical one, offering insights that are relevant to research and teaching in this area.

The positive reception of the articles here included by their intended audience will depend first and foremost on their ability to find a way into the hands of readers whose must-read lists have become increasingly saturated with interesting and relevant materials. As editors of this special volume, we have done everything in our power to earn a worthy place in that list. We would like to thank the editorial staff of *Letras Hispanas* for offering this opportunity to promote the interest in a subject about which we are passionate; as well as all those who contributed to this collective endeavor, either by submitting their work to the consideration of our external reviewers or by offering their time and expertise to review and provide feedback on such works. Thanks to multiple efforts from a wide range of collaborators, we are proud to

present this varied and interdisciplinary selection of current research on four decades of digital cultural production in Spain and Latin America.

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