

## **Teaching Literature in a Virtual Campus: The UOC Experience, 1998-2005**

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Right from the moment when the degree of Catalan Studies was inaugurated in 1998 at the UOC, we lecturers of Catalan literature, literary theory and comparative literature were keenly aware of the need for both systematisation and imagination in order to make our project successful. The fact is that it is not a simple matter to teach (and study) literature in a virtual environment because, although it might seem otiose to say so, it is not clear at all what the role of a lecturer is at a virtual university, and even less so what the role of an on-line lecturer of literature is. As novice lecturers in traditional universities, we all try to imitate, albeit with adaptations, the communicative and teaching strategies that struck us most positively when we were students. Almost unconsciously, what we do is to carry on with a way of teaching that seemed unquestionable because it was effective, trying to emulate the tricks of those school and university lecturers whose methods had aroused in us a passion for teaching. This is reasonable. We know – and Aristotle points it out in his *Poetics* – that imitation is one of the key ways that humans learn. However, when we have to rise to the challenge of teaching literature in a virtual environment, the possibility of imitation is rapidly ruled out, in spite of the temptation to see links between these two sorts of teaching. In short, we can immediately see that any attempt to simply adapt what is done in a face-to-face situation to the virtual classroom is condemned to failure. And for several reasons. When we become literature lecturers in the new environment of the virtual classroom, we recognise immediately that there is no certitude, no reference point to which we must inevitably turn. One has the feeling that almost everything has to be invented, tried out, discovered, tested; we are aware that we might get it right, but also running the risk of getting it wrong. This is the challenge. There is no guaranteed starting point, no model that we can adopt. It is true that our previous experience in conventional educational environments helps, but it is also true that in this type of environment, the important thing is not only the knowledge related with the subject that must be imparted, but also the communicative context, the semiotic framework, in which teaching and learning takes place; or rather, the new framework for the exchange of knowledge, because this is what actually happens.

We are faced, then, with a new learning context that is inevitably characterised or defined by the medium, by the digital technology, by the Internet. In spite of this, we have always thought – perhaps at times almost unconsciously – that this must in no way deter us. On the contrary, we have sought to make technology, the Internet, our close accomplice, not to show off the novelty or to be more cool than other universities, especially the conventional ones, but because we know, and we want to prove, that an imaginative yet realistic use of technological possibilities – both of hypertext and of other types of media – might improve the teaching of literature. It might help our students to understand (and feel) literature in a new way.

As we have shown in detail elsewhere<sup>1</sup>, the pedagogical model operating at the Catalan Open University (UOC) is based on asynchrony; it is a model where the lecturer does not see the students<sup>2</sup> – and the students do not see each other – in the same place or at the same time. This forces us to think very carefully about both the design of the virtual classroom and also the production of virtual teaching material, which is largely, but not exclusively, hypertextual (in some subjects, we necessarily rely on texts in paper format). This material must embrace the new complexity that characterises the current situation in literature studies but at the same time it must be “readable” and user-friendly. What does this mean? It means that we want students to realise that there are different ways to approach and study literature, regarding both the conceptualisation of the subject and the way that we present specific literary texts and their criticism. What we have to ensure, then, is that the virtual classroom is a place where the students feel comfortable, they know how to find their way round the contents, and they feel that they belong to a learning community whose focus and concern is literature. It is obvious that this implies a change in the relationship that lecturers and students have had with literary texts and their traditional explanations, commentaries and interpretations. “Teaching Literature in a Virtual University: A Way to Enhance Imagination!” (in the present volume) presents an overview of the Catalan Open University, as well as the way the virtual campus works along with a detailed review of two of the subjects that are most innovative, from the point of view both of the teaching material and of the functions of the virtual classroom. Bearing this in mind, then, here we will offer an overall conception of the teaching of literature at the university and explain the different choices that we have made in designing the degree course.

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<sup>1</sup> See Laura Borràs “Teaching Literature in a Virtual University: A Way to Enhance Imagination!” in the present volume (<http://www.openlit.gr/papers/Borras.pdf>).

<sup>2</sup> Except twice a semester, but these meetings are optional and, of course, not all the students can attend them.

To this end, when we set out on this virtual teaching adventure, we decided that we had to lay out an itinerary for the study of Catalan literature, including the necessary theoretical and comparative aspects, where progressive acquaintance with the literary corpus, as well as with the necessary critical methodologies, went hand in hand with developing the students' skills in using digital technologies. It is also important to recognise that students at the UOC, particularly those working towards Arts & Humanities degrees like Catalan Studies, are not typical university students. At least they are different from students at the traditional universities in Catalonia: in their age, their knowledge, what they have read and, in some cases, in their attitude and their capacity to reflect on the teaching process. In this respect we imagine that our experience is very similar to other European distance universities. But we have to consider that this is also true of mature and part-time students who attend evening courses at conventional universities.

### **Different Typologies of Literature Subjects**

As we have already mentioned, when the Program in Catalan Studies started, we realised that we had to design types of subjects that would provide our students with a syllabus that started simply and progressed in complexity, in terms of both its contents and the media involved. The reason for this is obvious: if someone who decided to do Catalan Studies at the UOC was not familiar with digital technologies, this should not be allowed to become a handicap, a stumbling block that held up their learning. This is why, alongside the progressive introduction of the literary content, we have arranged for the students to gradually become familiar with hypertext and multimedia materials. How does this work out in practice? Well literary studies often follow the linear, chronological order of literary history, that is to say they start from the earliest beginnings and work through to the present. However, we know that in practice these courses almost never reach the present day. In our case, the first contact that students of Catalan Studies have with the subject is through contemporary literature. This is because we see literature as a network, with both chronological and cultural dimensions, and it is often more effective for our students to start from a node in the network that is closer to them in time and, from this starting point, follow the different threads and links that lead them to what is more remote.

### **Types of subjects at the UOC**

**a) Panoramic subjects.** These subjects aim to give an overview of a long period in the history of literature. Our idea is to avoid the traditional view of the history of literature as linear and unconnected with other literatures in Spain. So, these subjects always include a strong comparative component.

Often our own education conditions our understanding of the study of literature. In Spanish universities, in particular in Philology and Catalan Studies, literary analysis has long been dominated by the historico-positivist method, which is still dominant today, and this implies that it is often difficult to introduce alternative methodologies for the study of literature. Our approach, then, in these panoramic subjects is to offer materials that may resemble traditional textbooks in the sense that they follow a linear path. However, in our case the teaching lays emphasis on direct acquaintance with the literary works and this is achieved through close reading and intensive study. This is especially true of the subjects that are covered in the first terms of the course, Contemporary Catalan Literature I and II, where we also arrange meetings with contemporary writers whose works are studied during the semester. As well as information on literary periods and their corresponding authors and works, these subjects also aim to provide a solid base that remains valid for the study of literature throughout the rest of the Program. Consequently, we are particularly careful about the most relevant methodology and we have designed the assignments so as to help the students learn how to deal with the analytical and critical dimensions of literary studies. At the same time, these subjects must help them acquire skills of exposition and synthesis through text commentaries, reviews and formal analyses of the works that are studied.

In these introductory subjects, it is quite important to promote the students' participation in class discussions of some of the works or of certain key literary issues, and this is true for various reasons. First, and bearing mind that we are dealing with distance learning, this helps to overcome the feeling of isolation and loneliness that some students experience as well as assist them to acquire good study habits. Second, the very fact of expressing their doubts, their worries, their hopes and their aspirations helps them to see things more clearly. When students formulate in writing a doubt, a query or a comment, it is quite common that they are already close to the solution. Third, if from the very start we manage to promote dialogue and communicative exchange in the virtual classroom, we are accustoming our students to the benefits of 'participatory democracy', and this fosters an attentive, critical view over the entire learning process.

Once again, a consideration of the new profile and the new needs of students using digital media bring us to a point where we realise that the on-line learning system exhibits

greater complexity than the traditional face-to-face class. In particular, we must attend to the students' needs, and this is why the importance of timing and of the study plan is crucial. At the very beginning of the course, the students have to know which, when and how assignments are to be completed throughout the course. This is why the students are always provided with a detailed Study Plan and a calendar with the dates for the reading of the learning materials and of the compulsory literary works, as well as dates for the delivery of assignments and participation in debates.

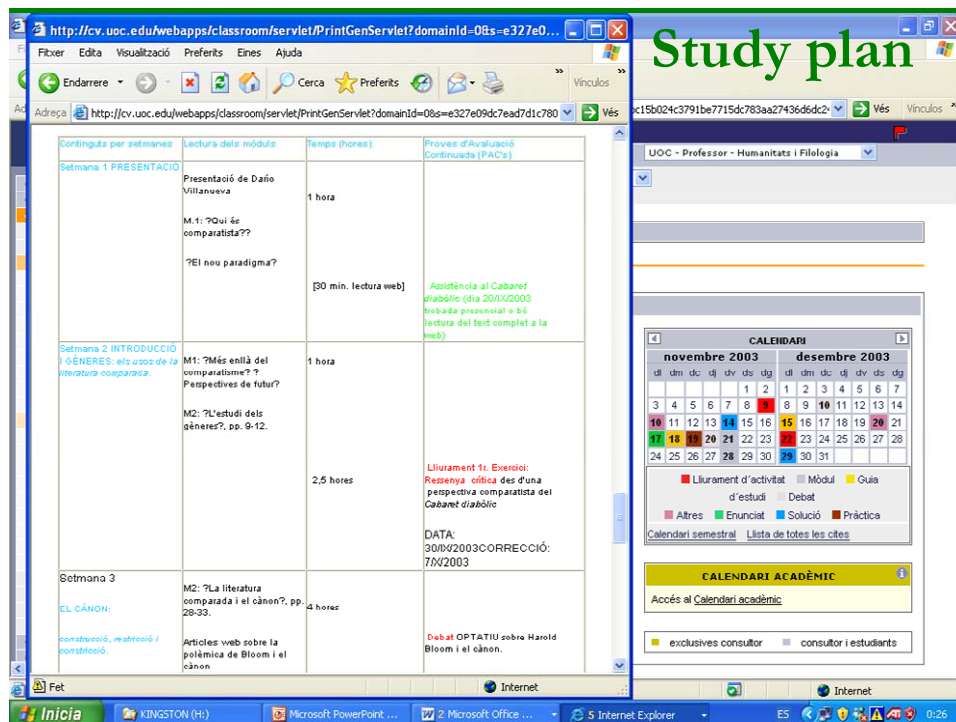


Figure 1

### Study-plan

Slowly, though, as students become accustomed to the virtual environment and to working with hypertextual teaching material, we can offer them material that is more daring, complex and suggestive. In the case of Medieval Catalan Literature, for example, the subject provides a panoramic journey and introduction to the most ancient Catalan literature, offering a general presentation of the main authors and works of the period and serving as grounding for subsequent studies. At the same time, this is where we begin the students' acculturation to the basic condition of the Internet, that is to hypertextuality.

The hypertext we use in this case is rather basic and is used more as a reservoir of contents that incorporate self-assessment tasks, non-textual material in audiovisual format, etc. It is very attractive since it allows the students to acquaint themselves, at a pace supervised by the lecturer, with information about many literary, historical, pictorial and

linguistic aspects, as well as with the complementary explanations, the links, the readings, etc., they will need in order to attain their final objectives.



Figure 2

*Sample of the hypertext of the subject Medieval Catalan Literature I from the Catalan Studies degree at the UOC.*

To this end, the subject also includes material in print format with suggestions, summaries and conclusions that facilitate the reading of the hypertexts. In the digital component, the texts are accompanied by notes (in floating windows) that are accessed through links or through the icons to complementary contents. These notes clarify a term or a passage or provide further information. The students also have at their disposal a series of complementary tools, mostly pictures and images: maps and diagrams, genealogical trees, chronologies, a glossary and a vocabulary, etc. Also included are exercises in the translation of old Catalan texts into modern Catalan, as well as the possibility to listen to recorded readings.

**b) Theoretical compulsory subjects with a strong practical component.**

Early on in their studies, the students also come into contact with certain subjects involving literary theory. In this type of subject, they gain a more profound understanding of the history of the subject, (from the classical texts of Plato and Aristotle through to today's post-structuralist and post-colonial theories) as well as becoming familiar with the basic conceptual tools they need in order to make detailed analyses of texts from different literary genres. Our

aim is also to trace connections between the different critical tendencies, methods or theoretical models and the concepts and procedures they use. A consideration of political, cultural and ideological debates of great historical interest or of current concern can provide the students with conceptual frameworks that are more general than those derived from literature itself. This is why, in this type of subject, it is not only a question of creating hypertext learning material where students can find a particular literary text analysed in different ways depending on the critical perspective (for example, structuralist, sociological, anthropological, psychoanalytical, etc). The students must also be provided with the opportunity of taking part in a collective ‘workshop’, a place for critical experimentation, where the lecturer posts corrected students’ assignments (including comments and advices) so that there is an element of common learning. In this way, students do not learn only from their own successes and setbacks, but also from those of their colleagues. In our experience, this type of practical collective workshop, where, after corrections and comments, the students’ individual assignments are made available to the rest of the group, promotes both discussion and learning. The ‘pooling’ allows all the students to see how others have tackled the set assignments, while at the same time they benefit from the remarks that the lecturer has provided for each individual attempt. Finally this area constitutes a bank of commentaries which accumulate from term to term and is one of the most visited areas of the classroom.

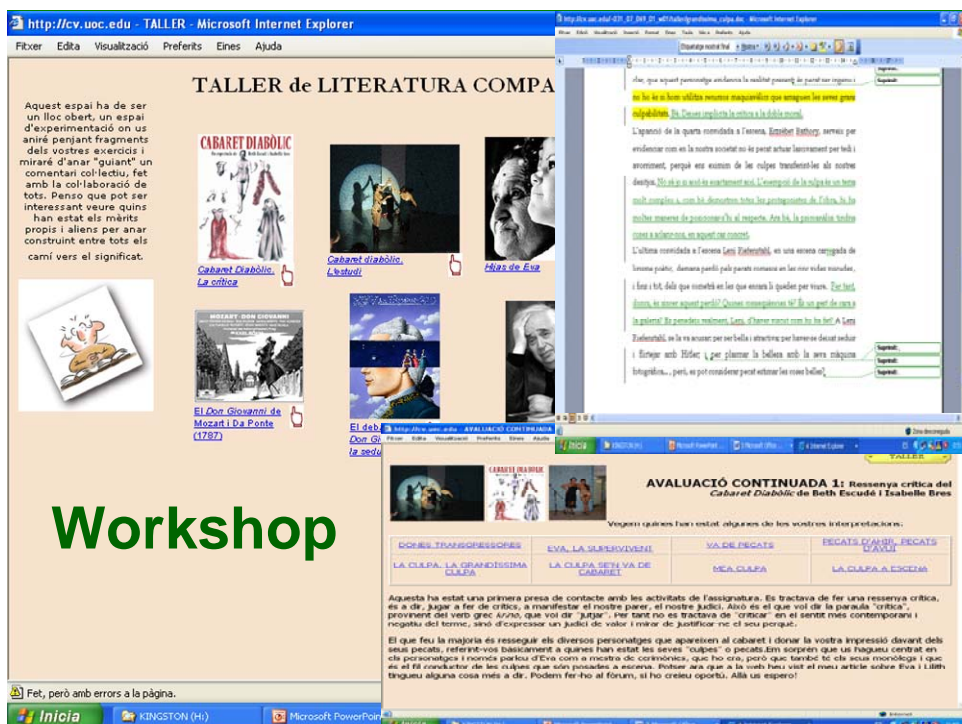


Figure 3

The workshop

Once they have acquired significant exposure to the history of Catalan literature in part one, as well as a good understanding of certain theories, conceptualisations and methods of textual analysis, our students are now equipped for the second level, where they can deal with a greater degree of complexity in the teaching materials. In the area of literary theory and comparative literature, for example, students can opt for different level two subjects, which in a way exemplify their own progressive immersion in the range of possibilities that a virtual campus offers.

For example, at a second level of conceptual and technological complexity, we find a compulsory subject entitled “The Study of Catalan Literature: theory and criticism”, with the sub-title “Twentieth Century Poetics”. This subject aims to provide an approach to various recent Catalan writers, but an unusual approach at that. Here, we start with an analysis of works, from which one seeks to draw out the main shared traits, with a view to characterising what is normally referred to as their poetics or conceptions of literature. To this end we also make use of non-literary texts, where writers reflect and comment on their view of literature. Within the production of poets, narrators, playwrights and essayists, alongside their creative works, we often find – especially in the case of poets – various texts (prefaces, talks, etc.) where authors attempt to explain how they understand literary writing or the genre that they cultivate, or how they experience the creative process, or how they view their own works, and so on. These *poetical formulations* are the main object of study in this subject.

Furthermore, the subject is presented in a format that is far from conventional. Instead of the normal theoretical exposition of contents – which is of course a perfectly legitimate option – we have tried to arrange the study material by starting from the practical application of the basic principle of literature studies: to *teach people how to read*. In this case, our aim is to help the students to read not the authors’ creative works but their theoretical and programmatic texts, which in fact constitute an important part of our literature. With this in view, the subject has been organised around an anthology of such texts, accompanied by their respective commentaries, which take the form of practical exercises in reading, focusing on the poetics of each author. The course thus combines a *theoretical exposition* with a *practical application*. Moreover, it needs to be said that on the subject’s web page the students have access to a whole series of complementary bibliographical references directly accessible in a click, as well as recorded interviews with some of the authors, which allow the students to enter more profoundly into their thoughts and reflections.

At a third level of complexity we have the subjects ‘Avant-gardes and Literature in Europe and Catalonia’, ‘Theatrical Representation’, ‘Comparative Literature’ and ‘Universal

Literary Themes”. The first of these provides an introduction to the concept of the ‘avant-garde’ and to the historical development of the main European avant-gardes from the beginnings up to the present day, including the main twentieth century Catalan literary avant-garde manifestations and their relationship with the avant-gardes in the rest of Europe. At the same time, our intention is to bring students to get to know the main authors of European and Catalan literature who are related to the avant-gardes of the twentieth century, as well as the relevant literary and ideological development evident in their works . In this way the subject combines theoretical and practical aspects and seeks to generate interest in the reading of avant-garde texts starting from comments in significant manifestos and poetry from Catalan and European avant-garde literature and relating them to their context. Lastly, we also want to relate the literary avant-garde to other artistic manifestations and to appreciate the special link between literature and the visual arts in these movements. This involves understanding the notion of breaking down the barriers between the various languages of artistic creation, which is the main aim of avant-garde movements, and getting students to see the notion of play that lies behind the whole of the avant-garde by trying themselves some calligrams or visual poems that are collected in a web to be found at the HERMENEIA site: <http://www.uoc.edu/in3/hermeneia/exemples/avantguardes/index.htm>.

If someone approaches ‘Theatrical Representation’ with a preconceived notion of theatre or of theatre studies, they will be surprised because this is not a ‘history of the theatre’ (or even a ‘history of entertainment’), although the exposition does not avoid either historiographical orchestration or the chronological arrangement of the majority of the contents. The first impression, then, is that we are not dealing with strictly analytical subject matter, although we have to accept that we do not evade the terminology or the exposition that belong to theatrical semiotics. In a generic sense, the analysis of performances studies the internal organisation of the sign systems that make up entertainment as well as the dynamics of the meaning/communication processes that are generated by the interaction between the actors (in the broadest sense of the term) and the audience. We start from the notion that a performance is not only the realisation (one of many possible ones) of a dramatic text. Every text allows a thousand and one readings and therefore a thousand and one stage productions. Consequently, one cannot completely subordinate the study of the theatre performance to the study of the dramatic text. The analysis of the processes that are involved in the translation of a text for the stage is a fundamental element of any critical perspective on theatrical performances. In spite of this, the staging has its own internal logic, its own laws. Recent studies have tended towards a general theory that brings together the various disciplines

which focus on the performance: semiotics, structuralist methodology, history, theories of reception. Theatrical analysis cannot simply ignore all the other partial aspects that contribute to research (such as sociological, anthropological, psychoanalytical, pragmatic, ideological). This clearly interdisciplinary approach undoubtedly enriches the viewpoints and encourages multiple insights and discoveries.

In order to create a prior conceptual framework, the first two modules of the subject, which situate the agents of dramatic creation in their area of action, provide the basic tools for considering in an open and acceptable fashion the complex phenomenon that is a theatrical performance. The subject thus provides the key concepts that are involved in a performance and the relationships between them. The later modules give the essential historical outline onto which this knowledge is projected and propose a kaleidoscopic view from the origins of theatre up to contemporary theatrical movements. This historical journey only takes into account the most important renewals, those that have clearly conditioned subsequent developments, and constantly focuses on the phenomenon of the theatrical performance. All this allows one to grasp the changes that have come about throughout history in the conventions of theatrical performances and to appreciate the historical sources that lie behind our current theatrical trends. In short, the intention is: to familiarise the students with the concepts that are involved in the staging, the interpretation and the performance as a whole; to bring out the basic lines of theatrical action, so as to allow an analysis of theatrical language and performances; to introduce all the aspects related to the appearance and development of theatrical representations, while at the same time – by means of historical, aesthetic and socio-cultural coordinates – setting this process in the context of Western culture.

‘Comparative Literature’ is a theoretical and practical introduction to comparison. The first part of the subject studies the history of the discipline as well as the main theoretical issues, while the second part combines the theoretical analysis and the setting up of critical concepts with some actual practice in comparison. The course assignments are designed to cover these two aspects, the theoretical and the practical. Moreover, the subject also has a workshop-type web page of the type already explained. The students have access to it from the virtual classroom, and it can be enriched with samples of students’ assignments, current news related to the topics, newspaper articles, etc. In this sense, this subject, related as it is with the country’s current literary production allows for the incorporation of organised cultural activities which can be studied throughout the term from a comparative perspective. For instance, one term we went to see two performances of the opera *Don Giovanni*, (a classical one and an unorthodox modern one), in order to study it from the point of view of

thematology, while in another term we had a cabaret performed at the university. All this material, irrespective of the specific timing of the proposed activity – which obviously varies from term to term – is incorporated into the subject web page. This is what happened with the *Diabolical Cabaret*: we brought a cabaret to the presential meeting at the university instead of giving a lecture. This piece is a show that uses the cabaret format to present a selection of women, both mythical and historical, who had to apologise – whether repentant or not, sincerely or cynically – for their thoughts, words or actions. In this case the web page carried the text and a digitalised video of the show. The different scenes in the *Diabolical Cabaret* are inspired by the languages of the cabaret and music hall such as ventriloquism, juggling, transformations, striptease, legerdemain, escapology and other metaphors of illusion. It thus constitutes a good practical sample of the genres and registers of a semiotic terrain like the theatre. In the conceptualisation of this case, we have also taken into account the two main features of this type of show: the use of irony as indirect criticism and the technique of collage, plus, of course, the gender approach to literary criticism. It represented, in other words, a wonderful opportunity to put into practice in a transversal fashion some of the contents of the subject while at the same time incorporating a highly topical element (the show had its premiere in July 2003 at the Sitges International Theatre Festival; in September 2003 it was performed at the university and became the object of analysis for the whole term.)

As for “Universal Literary Themes”, given that there are already several published articles about it, we would simply like to point out that it has a markedly experimental character, since it strives to be a subject that explores all of the teaching possibilities of hypertext in the teaching of literature from a comparative perspective. Consequently, the first ideas we had when we were designing the teaching materials pointed to the need for them to share the features of the medium: plurality of viewpoints, openness, multilineal organisation, greater inclusion of non-textual information and a fundamental reconfiguration of the access to the discourse of knowledge. However, having made this choice, we ran the risk of not knowing how to use hypertext to create a new way of understanding the teaching of literature from the viewpoint of comparatism, and to turn it into privileged way of teaching literature. We were more likely to fall into the “traditional” fallacy that claims the major advantage of the hypertext to be that it provides students with more contextual information. This view of the educational hypertext, presents it as an ideal tool for supplying historical references, translations and bibliographical information, in other words a kind of encyclopaedic knowledge. This might be the intention of a traditional lecturer of literary history, but not of a literary theorist or a lecturer of comparative literature, because our aim was not to give classes

on the historical conditions or the biography of a writer in the framework of a general course (where hypertext is in fact a useful tool for the students' independent exploration of these aspects). In that case we would be using the technology as a means to reinforce traditional paradigms rather than creating a new epistemological space.

Our choice brings with it some of the problems set out by Landow when he dealt with literary criticism. For example, if we construct a simple, easily navigable hypertext, with unmarked reading paths that allow the possibility of getting 'lost', is this good or bad for learning? Since we are responsible for teaching how to read literature from a comparatist perspective, what is our aim? To set up fixed buoys in the middle of the sea of navigation so that the students must inevitably follow the route or, on the contrary, make them see that getting 'lost' is an inevitable part not only of any reading process but also of criticism itself? In this respect we found the reflections of Mireille Rosello (1997: 147-188) very interesting. This professor of French at the University of Michigan maintains that there are basically two ways for a user to tackle a hypertextual space: either you trace a route where previously there wasn't one or you use a previously prepared map. One can therefore distinguish two paradigms for travellers: those who follow the first will come across discoveries, new frontiers, explorers, the attraction of adventure, but also the traumatic meeting with civilisation and everyone being fit into the same straitjacket; the second will be a process of decisions and selections, where the traveller chooses his/her own route in a network of pre-existing connections and nodes (Rosello, 1997: 156).

Our proposal attempts to allow these two to cohabit since we feel that both are essential in the learning process. Since the critico-didactical texts that are produced in this subject allow the students multiple readings that exceed the principle of linearity, they offer the possibility of combining analytical and hermeneutic processes. They thus encourage the design of a literary map with multiple interconnected itineraries, while at the same time allowing students to conceive and try out multiple routes in their critical reading and writing.

In relation to this, we must emphasise the essential role of lecturers in this virtual subject. Since the students already have access to abundant information in the hypertext materials and the organised resources that can be found both on the Internet and in traditional libraries, the role of the lecturer is not so much to transmit information, but rather to help the students deal with all this information. As we point out to the students right at the start of the course, our teaching philosophy promotes active and personalized criticism, tending more to the construction of individual reading routes than to the assimilation of pre-defined canons (Pinto, 2001). Consequently, the subject draws the students' attention to certain themes that

are amply represented in modern literature, (such as travel, desire and the identity/otherness dialectic, although of course there are many others), as well as texts that serve as symptomatic instances of these themes, but not as unique exclusive examples that must necessarily be read and known. From our point of view, what is important, is not a compulsory set of literary readings and theoretical and critical references, but rather the teaching of a way of reading. As is well known, one of the greatest discursive possibilities of hypertext is its potential to combine both a syntagmatic and a paradigmatic level of reading. We therefore always have a literary text that is considered as a discursive model and that serves as a matrix to introduce the theme that is being analysed. The texts are continually 'interrupted', annotated, 're-read' in order to offer commentaries, allusions to other possible reading routes, thus opening new interpretative perspectives, connections with conceptual associations and analogies, and also direct references to other texts (literary, cinematographic, pictorial, critical.) All of this undoubtedly offers new ways to interact with the literary texts and to make them meaningful. This is the way Raffaele Pinto puts it in addressing the students in the virtual classroom: "By following the intertextual connections (both of a genetic and of an analogical type), which mark the route through a hypertext corpus, one traces reading routes that are fortuitous and totally subjective but that illustrate the diffusion and articulation of the theme in the literary tradition. After familiarising themselves with the texts presented in the materials, and with the navigation tools that these materials offer, the students' main task in the course is to select some subjectively relevant themes and construct their own (hyper-) text corpus. The development of both the earlier, more receptive, part of the course and the later, more active, part involves a constant dialogue between the lecturer and the students." (Pinto, 2001).

Although it is true that the metaphorical system that governs our conception of reading still depends on printing, I also believe that our experience with the design and the teaching of this subject has made it clear that hypertext can question the relationship between reading and technology. It can also lead to a re-definition of how the students themselves behave, or write to each other, in a collective space of on-line learning, as if it was a play for voices. Pinto, who has not only been a virtual lecturer of the subject but was also one of the team when we designed the teaching materials, has made a fascinating reflection on his experience of teaching students on-line: "From anywhere (in the reading) towards the user and from the user towards anywhere (in the writing), knowledge irradiates and disseminates, thus producing a virtually endless number of intertextual connections, which represent the infinite forms of the discursive configuration of the individual, whose kaleidoscopic identity suffers a dual tension:

on the one hand, centripetally and reconstructive, and, on the other, centrifugal and deconstructive” (op. cit. p. vi)

**c) Optional subjects related to contemporary literature.**

Besides pedagogical and technological experimentation, literary studies at the UOC have always been characterised by the wish to be in constant touch with the contemporary literary scene. To this end we have also designed two subjects which, from complementary standpoints, attempt to set before the students certain topics for reflection that are all too often ignored by academic institutions.

The first one is “The Construction of the Catalan Literary Canon”. This subject focuses on the process of formulation of the literary tradition and canon and on how different institutions intervene in this process. Above all we seek to make students aware of the historical character of formation and transformation in the Catalan literary tradition, while they also learn about the receptive mechanisms through which the literary institution sets up a dynamic process to formulate and reformulate the canonical repertoire. This approach allows us to detect and analyse the intervention of different literary agents (publishers, lecturers, critics, anthologists, translators, adaptors, etc.) in the mechanisms that regulate the introduction of works of the literary past in the canon. It also fosters the development of a critical attitude vis-à-vis the functioning of Catalan literary institutions in the last fifty years or so, by analysing and evaluating a series of representative and symptomatic cases of literary reception of Catalan canonical authors as well as writers outside the system. The print material presents the minimal information that is necessary to follow the course, given that its aim is to encourage reflection rather than to transmit information. This material has to be seen as the starting point that provides the conceptual tools and the reference frameworks, as well as the study and analysis of cases and processes of literary communication, that together allow the development of a critical, methodological and historiographical discourse which is applicable in different ambits. This is why the material is complemented by a web-page that presents a sample of articles and book extracts of three different types: (1) Primary historiographical sources: reproductions of prefaces, indexes and other historiographical texts that are not easily available for the purposes of analysis, study and comparison; (2) Specialised articles and book extracts that complement and enrich different aspects dealt with in the compulsory material; (3) Press articles that illustrate literary debates and that lead to a metaliterary analysis in the here-and-now of the ongoing creative process. Since this subject fosters reflection on the currently extant processes that lead to canon formation, it is essential

that there is debate in the virtual classroom, and here, as in the other cases that we have seen, stimulation of dialogue by the lecturer is fundamental.

Finally, there is 'Catalan Poetry of Today', which is designed to enrich the offer of more strictly contemporary literature in the Catalan Studies Program at our university. It consists largely of 'field work' (to the extent that this expression can be applied to literary studies) on the most recent Catalan poetry and its protagonists. Since the object of analysis is so close, and in part still 'under construction', the material involved, with its rhythm and proposed assignments, has the general feel of a reader, or research in progress, on Catalan poetry written and published in recent years and the different viewpoints of its authors. The basic material for the subject consists of three recently published books of poems, which the students have to read with the guidance of the lecturer. What is most interesting about the subject, though, is the virtual debate that takes place with one of the three poets. During a specified period of the term, the students make a close study of one of the books and discuss it in the classroom with the lecturer. Later, the author of the book is invited to the virtual classroom for a week, so that the students can make comments and ask questions, while at the same time sharing with the poet a reading of his book. The result is an interesting exercise in criticism, since normally the works being studied are so recent that they have so far received little attention from the critics. Subsequently, this debate is edited and placed on a literary website that is open to the public. In this way, it is made available to the literary and academic communities and thus becomes a reference point for the study of the work, especially because in most cases these exercises in criticism are fresh, represent a variety of viewpoints and are of a high quality.

Thinking about the way in which we transmit information for educational purposes is never a neutral action. The new digital paradigm invites us to reflect on the tactical decisions that we must adopt and, of course, on the way we transmit or allow the generation of knowledge in the era of media literacy. That's why when we started teaching in a completely virtual university such as the UOC it was necessary to reformulate and reorganize the relationship between sources, information or knowledge and the modalities of its transmission in a new way. Since then we have developed a degree in Catalan Philology with a large number of literature subjects. Nowadays, our day to day work as virtual lecturers combines electronic didactic materials, online resources, digital libraries, web-sites of reference, virtual exhibitions, etc. and a virtual workshop that is highly valued by our students as it allows them to compare their exercises with those of their colleagues and benefit from their criticism. We

must seriously consider that the act of online teaching using these digital resources means being detached from acquired habits and transforming discourse communicative techniques. The ways of testing “validity” in a literary analysis have been deeply modified, since we can now develop our critical discourse according to a logic that is no longer linear and deductive, but open and relational. We must react to the transfer of knowledge by accompanying students in their process of intellectual maturation, taking part in the virtual blackboard or inciting the debate in the virtual forum, correcting exercises in a very personalized way, answering queries and doubts, considering new questions... After all, it is a holistic and beneficial task for the students, since it obliges them to read, to compare, to listen to their colleagues as well as to the lecturer, to participate, to organize their ideas in logical form and to present them coherently. In other words: to organize and build their learning process in a radically individual way, using their own initiative and capabilities. This approach to philology has proved to be much more attentive to the subject that has to interpret than to the text that has to be interpreted and to its objective historical reality. It is more focused on the person that is learning than on the lecturer, and thus completely different from the ways in which literature is taught in a traditional university model.

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