



Poetic creation in new contexts: networked poetry and cyberpoetry

Creación poética en nuevos contextos: poesía en red y ciberpoesía

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Received: 07/10/2020; Accepted: 30/04/2021

Abstract

In this paper we approach the literary practices with which young readers have a greater connection today. Creation in networks and reading through screens have configured a new communication model between authors and recipients that we need to analyse in order to have starting points on which to build literary education. The main objective of the present study is to review the modifications arising from ICT in the creation and reception of poetry, through the description of some of the literary content that young people access from digital devices, conceptually delimiting two major types of reading, which require very different skills and sticking to the field of poetry, one of the genres with great popularity among young people and adolescents. It is concluded that a specific training of mediators in reading and writing is necessary not only to make all these areas visible, but also to use them in favor of literary education.

Keywords: Poetry; poetic creation; reader response; literary education; web 2.0 technologies; reading writing relationship

Resumen

En el presente trabajo nos aproximamos a las prácticas literarias con las que los jóvenes lectores tienen una mayor vinculación en la actualidad. La creación en las redes y la lectura a través de las pantallas han configurado un nuevo modelo de comunicación entre autores y receptores que necesitamos analizar para tener puntos de partida sobre los que edificar la educación literaria. El objetivo principal del trabajo es revisar las modificaciones surgidas a partir de las TIC en la creación y recepción de la poesía, por medio de la descripción de algunos de los contenidos literarios a los que los jóvenes acceden desde los dispositivos digitales. Así, acotaremos conceptualmente dos grandes tipologías de lectura que requieren de habilidades muy diferentes, y ciñéndonos al ámbito de la poesía, uno de los géneros con gran auge entre jóvenes y adolescentes. Se concluye que es precisa una formación específica de mediadores en lectura y escritura no solo para visibilizar todos estos ámbitos, sino también para emplearlos en favor de la educación literaria.

Palabras clave: Poesía; creación poética; respuesta lectora; educación literaria; relaciones lectura escritura; tecnologías web 2.0



Networked literature versus cyberliterature

Networked literature

When we refer to literature on the web, we are obviously talking about literature that can be accessed through digital devices. And this encompasses both conventional literature digitised or published directly in electronic format, as well as that created precisely because ICT tools allow constant interaction from the genesis of the works to their updating, prequels or sequels... And of course in the promotion through what is being called the BBB community (bloggers, bookstagramers and booktubers) (Bellido, 2017; García & Gómez, 2019).

This literature and its uses take up practices that had already been advanced on paper somehow: collaborative writing or sequels for fans such as the big classic *El Quijote de Avellaneda*, which Juan Carlos Rodríguez (2003) analyses by describing the link to the imposture of Don Quixote himself. When he meets his double “he will discover not only that it is written in his story, not only that he is rewriting his life, but that it has already been written, and in an unexpected and unusual way” (p. 375).

The fact is that these practices in the digital world are on the rise almost *ad infinitum* and it is important to see “what is new within the usual things, as well as what is old in the novelties” (García-Montero, 2018, p.13). But, in any case, it always shows the production of an individual or group of individuals who participate in the creative act of a work that can add to the word other elements of communication: drawings, music, hyperlinks. Martos-García (2007, 2009a) conducted a pioneering study of some of these writing/reading practices that had their sense of existence in the network.

In these two examples of networked literature - mere digitisation, which we will not refer to again although it is undoubtedly necessary to continue studying it (Arlandis & Rodríguez, 2021) and that born on the net - we can find a large group of users, creators-recipients, scribblers, readers-authors, etc. (Morales, 2013, p. 224), who spend lots of time in enjoying reading and recreating/recreating themselves with it.

This literature, created mostly by young people, is enormously popular among readers of the same generation. This is the first striking thing: the large number of readers who are attentive to these works and their creators: “These authors who have turned the networks into a breeding ground for unexpected readers have managed to turn poetry - which was supposed to be something contingent for young people in the 21st century - into something necessary” (Sánchez-García, 2018b, p. 212). This dimension was absolutely unthinkable before ICT tools, as we already said, “almost a miracle” as García Montero (2018, p.19) would say with humour, referring specifically to poetry, as a minority genre. Recent work by Sánchez-García (2019), Sánchez-García and Aparicio (2020) and Quiles-Cabrera (2020) can be consulted.

These are texts for which the web is a space for visualisation, but also for joint creation - in a certain way - with the reader. On texts written on blogs, Instagram, etc., it can give a recommendation or accept unconditionally; it can influence what the writer, sometimes insecure, has posted publicly. It may seem somewhat masochistic, but the reality is that, for both the

author and the reader, this way of walking “accompanied” is a process of creation that is highly gratifying for both, just like a child taking his first steps supervised by an adult. Because he is no longer the anonymous author of whom we only (no small thing) know the work as a result of his introspection, but rather, from the very first moment we give him a face, but also a voice, the way he moves, and his tone when reading or speaking...

Critics and more adult readers look with attention and a certain caution at this reading phenomenon, which is turning to works whose quality is called into question. What is most symptomatic of this is the fact that the works themselves are not generally analysed as much as the phenomenon itself for the moment. It is not the aim of this paper to go into the analysis of writers or fans. To that end, see Martos-García (2007, 2009a, 2009b) and Cassany (2010, 2012), among others.

In any case, we should not forget the fact that we should bear in mind that certain criteria are subject to the historical moment in which these works are produced, and also to the moment in which such judgements are made, in order to consider that a specific work is “of quality.” Hence the intense debate around the expansion of the reading canon and the search for a balance between classics and heritage texts and the new manifestations we are referring to (Palmer, 2019).

Cyberliterature

In contrast to the online literature practices described above, very easily accessible, we have what has been called cyberliterature, electronic literature -digital, virtual...- since there is no consensus on the name with which to refer to this phenomenon (Morales, 2013), which would fall within what Aarseth (1997) calls ergodic literature. But there is a consensus that these works can only be enjoyed through digital media; it is impossible to put them on paper. It is not feasible because each work requires a specific programme or software to be fully developed, as well as the reader’s interaction. But there is still more. As the production of these works becomes more sophisticated, we find that the texts are often completed differently depending on the reader, and it is even impossible for them to be repeated twice identically. This is one of the characteristics that makes it very difficult to establish a typology.

Let’s take Santiago Ortiz’s 2004 work, *Bacterias argentinas*, which is considered narrative by the author himself¹. In this work we see how the mergers of the *avant-gardes* have reached a dimension through ICTs that no longer allows us to travel the back-and-forth paths of Cortázar’s *Rayuela* and all the children’s books of the “discover your own adventure” type. We will see later how this is even more complex for cyberpoetry. Escandell (2019) highlights three particularities that characterise cyberspace works, digital works, etc.: their experimental nature; the need for a guide to be able to enjoy them in this wandering between “algorithms and choices” and the “socialisation of their production” by having to rely on an interdisciplinary work team for their production.

Thus, we find that cyberliterature requires different knowledge and skills in order to be enjoyed, a higher media literacy (Martínez-Ezquerro, 2019b) that speaks of technical knowledge that is not as popular as in the case of those used in “networked literature,” to maintain the

nominal differentiation that we have established. Gache (2006) underlines the instructional character of this type of work, as can be seen in the following statements:

The concept of instruction, on the other hand, is implicit in the programmable nature of computers and is thus connatural to these manifestations.

In this type of textuality, the work is put into action by being activated by the reader, through his actions, choices and rewritings. Here, the boundaries between reading and writing are blurred.

As will be discussed later, we are now at the opposite end: in the face of the maximum dissemination of online literature, we find works - for the moment - aimed at a select public, among eccentrics or digital geeks. These are texts for very minority readers/creators, with a certain mastery of computer space, a skill without which it would often be impossible not only to access the creations but, above all, to compose them. This is why they are usually works of collective authorship that may involve programmers, writers, sound specialists... And it is at this point that something appears that gives them a completely unusual character: the writer-creator can be a human being, but it can also be the machine itself. Or a joint performance (Morales, 2013, 2019; Saum-Pascual, 2018; Escandell, 2019).

It seems clear that when we include the machine as creator, we are giving artificial intelligence a quality we thought was exclusive to the human mind until now. This increasingly complex relationship between human beings and technology leads us to new scenarios, "Technology not only permeates events, but has become an event that leaves nothing untouched" (Santaella, 2003, p. 30).

In the two short decades since the publication of the paper, electronic devices have multiplied and artificial intelligence has reached devices that penetrate the depths of our privacy. The relationship with them is produced through oral language precisely. We talk and they respond. We cannot help but think of the reflection put forward by the aforementioned Santaella:

Machines will become more and more like human beings, and not the other way around. Current research in computing is moving in that direction. But at the same time, there is no question of developing salvationist ideologies about technologies. If they are our creations, they inevitably carry within them our contradictions and paradoxes (2003, p. 30).

It is certainly something that will continue to be at the centre of the debate over and over again, globally, not only culturally, like Tochi's statement from another point of view on the paradoxical situation presented by this phenomenon:

- the one that wants to transform human beings into machines - robots that could replace human beings even in the most vital jobs, such as medicine, is scary because they remind us of the extent to which we, human beings, have become machines (2020, p. 7).

Networked poetry and cyberpoetry

Networked poetry

If we take book sales statistics into account, or the presence of the genre in textbooks, we have to admit that the poetic genre is the least frequent among readers' favourites.

A study commissioned by the Spanish Federation of Booksellers Guilds (CONECTA, 2019) shows reading in both paper and digital format of e-books and, although it includes the use of other reading spaces such as blogs and social networks, it does not specify the reading of different literary genres in these spaces, so that the statistics only correspond to the practice of reading in book format, whether in paper or digital format.

Only 1.5% of the books bought in Spain in 2018 were poetry books. Compared to other periods, such as Spain's Golden Age, when it was the genre par excellence, or other countries such as Iran, where it continues to be the genre par excellence, readers of poetry seem to be in recession. However, although this is partly true, there are many reading practices visible in other spheres that are not counted and which, in the case of poetry, are of enormous significance. In their work, Quiles-Cabrera and Martos-Núñez (2019) refer to activist groups such as Acción Poética and other entrepreneurial practices related to the dissemination of poetry in urban contexts. The existence of these reading trends and the concern to promote knowledge and enjoyment of poetry reading have led some institutions to try to collect these practices in order to disseminate them as widely as possible and thus offer readers this genre which, with ICTs, integrates that collaborative and multimodal character that can be essential when it comes to promoting a taste for reading in general, and for reading poetry in particular. This is the case of the Miguel Hernandez Cultural Foundation, which promoted the project *Poesía en red y ciberpoesía*².

A pioneering work by Valverde (2017) highlights the value of this youth poetry and raises the controversies generated by this networked creation. Sánchez-García (2018, 2019) does an exceptional job of tracing the poetic production of young people who write from the outset in order to disseminate their work online. It is a reflection on the production of poetry, because it is not simply a question of achieving a much wider dissemination, but the way of writing poetry itself changes completely. From the isolated writer who only comes into physical contact with his readers at book presentations, despite the intimate one-way relationship established through the work in the intimacy of reading, the poet now knows the reader and is known by the reader. It is a reverse process when making the journey from the reader to the text: a text is no longer read because the author is well-known and important, but because the reader has been attracted to a text on the net, he even empathises with the author. It is not the historiographical projection of the didactics of literature - authors and analysis of works - that acts as a bridge for young people and adolescents, but the reading practice itself, understood as a game, as relaxation and as a task related to the digital sphere (Iribarren, 2016). It is this factor that should put us on our guard as mediators and should be taken as a starting point. When a student who defines himself as a non-reader (because he does not go to literature books on paper) becomes aware that by being an inveterate follower of certain bookstagrammers or young poets on the net, his link with literature is much stronger than he thought, and he will be more aware of his reading self. This will be a turning point in bringing it closer to the literature of the canon.

Poetry is often part of all this, framing it in this new virtual relationship that seems much more intimate. But, in an absolutely peculiar way, this relationship often leads to these works finally being put on paper; to the reader (and the author) wanting to hold in their hands a physical work that they can "embrace," that they can underline or mark in different ways, that they can have dedicated and signed by their author in an exclusive way.

Except for research works such as those cited by Sánchez-García, Rodríguez-Gaona (2019), or Rivero-Taravillo (2019), a critic who directly considers these works to be very deficient, it is common to find expressions such as “leaving aside the quality or not of this poetry,” “without considering whether this is literature or not...”. In view of this, we insist, it is important to find a balance so that, as we pointed out above, we can open up the range of possibilities that bring the potential reader closer to literary creation.

It is not a question of tracing what the change in poetry has meant in itself, but of being aware that from the reflection and intimacy claimed as a right by Virginia Wolf (“the right to a room of one’s own”), we have moved on to “the right to a public showcase.” Benegas, in his text on the new poetics, describes it as follows: “From a world that pulsed with memory and recollection we enter the pure present, swift and changing” (2017, p. 397). So, for this writer today, “dispersed attention produces writing on the fly, untidy, which bases its authenticity on instantaneous reflection. This danger is particularly acute for digital natives”. (2017, p. 397). Luis García Montero (2018), the current director of the Cervantes Institute and defender of young poets, also wants to put a certain necessary point of reflection on some of these new productions that abound on the web. The change is enormous as it greatly conditions the moment of writing. The real presence of the reader through the networks can mark the development of the work. According to Sánchez-García (2018b), the poet “tests” his texts with the reader, almost by way of trial and error, as if it were any other product. He knows which poems get the most hits, the most likes. You can rewrite, polish, change whatever is proposed to you and you judge it worthwhile.

Thus, only once the author is very sure of the enthusiasm he expects, does he decide to publish on paper, which has now also changed radically. Previously, the poet used to go in search of publishers and obtained small editions, now it is often the publishers, often small companies, who are on the lookout for poets on social networks and offer to publish a book for these creators. Thus, publishers benefit from this shift, as do other media, as in the case described by Jenkins of the American TV channel Current, which intended that a quarter of its broadcasts should come from products made by amateurs, after a selection made by the viewers themselves on a specific website (Jenkins, 2008, p. 239).

Thus, we see that, publishers and television - among others - are guided by the criteria of the spectator (reader) in this culture of convergence, without the filter of specialists who guarantee the quality or rigour of the works, as the case may be. The world of culture is often conditioned by the audience ratings and sales volume of a given product. But this question would open up a new space for debate and reflection, which can be taken up in future papers.

Therefore, we refer to writers and works that have been born online. They have grown thanks to the watering of followers who multiply exponentially and interact with the poet. So now it is not only what the work itself conveys or its reading, that counts, but also the personal sympathies that the author arouses: if he is a dynamic person who answers emails and suggestions, who knows how to make the reader feel recognised in his power to give a like, and even if his ideology is that of the reader, he is guaranteed a greater number of followers/readers, regardless of the quality of his texts. And it is significant that a large proportion of these writers are women, just as a large proportion of the recipients thereof (Rosal, 2018; Sánchez-García, 2018; Sánchez-García & Aparicio, 2020, Arlandis 2018).

López-Souto (2019) highlights the idea that this genre, despite having been born on the web, is aimed at the printed book, as the reader's link with poetry has somewhat sentimental implications, in which possessing the physical object in order to be able to reread it, point to it, turn the pages, is especially important. And it is an idea that the authors themselves express directly: they speak first and foremost of the printed book, which they have been able to access because publishers have noticed them. One of them, author Santatecla (2019), who has encouraged others to write online, states as follows: "You never know who is reading you, you may be interesting to a publisher." This would explain how book signings by well-known booktubers or bookstagrammers are sometimes more extensive and intense than expected: if they are online authors, it is taken for granted that their readers stay online; however, we observe how this phenomenon reveals a very different reality. What started on the web is now looking for print.

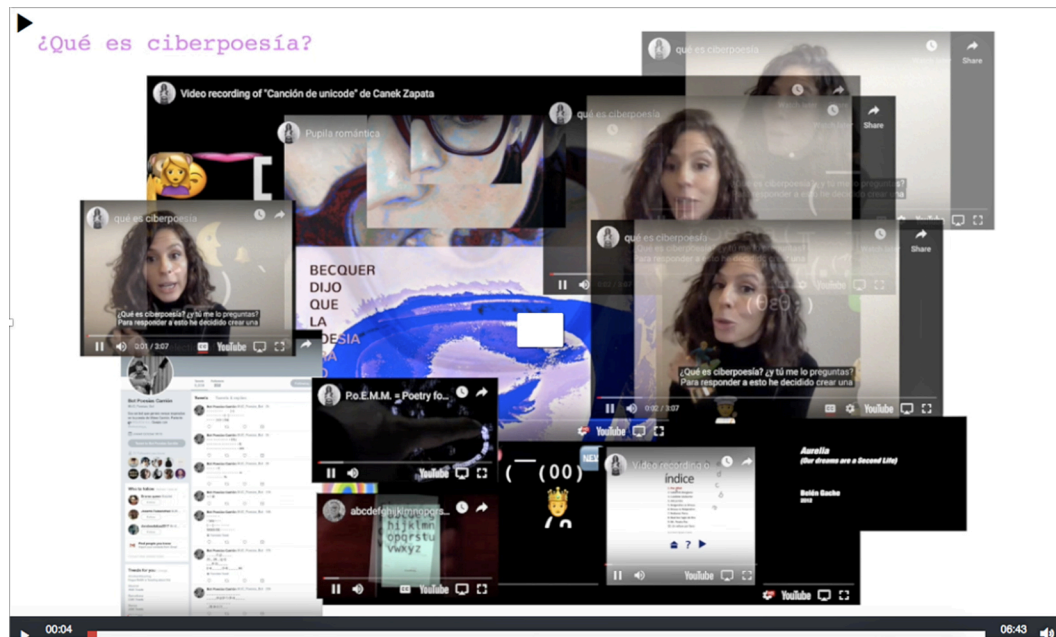
In this reverse process pointed out by Sánchez-García (2018), publishers play it safe. Although, in principle, it is the small publishers who take the risk of publishing these works, whose authors are supported by online readers, today there are also large publishers who are committed to these young authors. Indeed, it is not a very risky competition since, to mention some cases of young Spanish poetry, we have Lena Carrilero, a singer-songwriter who incorporates music into her writing and has more than 13,000 followers; Santatecla with more than 40,000; Sara Búho with more than 300,000 or Elvira Sastre who has more than 400,000, according to data extracted from their respective Instagram accounts, on 19th March 2020.

Cyberpoetry

As is the case when studying literature in general, when talking about the poetic genre, it is clear that the distance between "networked poetry" and cyberpoetry is immense. Saum-Pascual (2019), one of the researchers who is currently working most on these issues, explains what cyberpoetry is, but using the same stylistic resources as those used to create a cyberpoem. Nicanor Parra (1972, p. 33), in order to define what Antipoetry was, had started from Bécquer's question, suitably adapted, "you are asking? Antipoetry is you", written on a tray of paper. In this veil, Saum-Pascual states: "you are asking what cyberpoetry is...?", and answers with a sort of document describing it with a complex example³. The home page, shown in Figure 1, has a screen in the centre of the image: "Bécquer said poetry...". All screens are active at the same time, the sound reverberates, each element contributes something different. This is an extremely interesting document that introduces us to the world of digital creation.

Figura 1.

¿Qué es la ciberpoesía? Web page



Other nuances can be found that may help to better understand the complexity. Morales (2013) highlighted the difficulty of classifying them, not only because of the hybridisation of codes but also because of “the difficulty of identifying in these creations the structural features through which we usually recognise poetry, narrative or theatre” (p. 97).

Capparelli et al. (2000) provide a detailed review of this ascendancy that shapes cyberpoetry, describing in detail the different movements in Europe and America and highlighting:

Vanguard, while epistemological rupture, only makes sense while we do not separate the aesthetic project and the theoretical thought. Its physical attributes are categories: the constructive principle, abstraction and ambiguity attest to the intensity of aesthetic principles irreducible to the control of artistic practice. (2000, p. 69)

Capparelli et al. (2000, p. 76) even presented in this early study a categorisation of the types of cyberpoetry according to a series of “poetic experiments”, as we can see below:

1. *Galerias e coletâneas em rede.*
2. *Fábrica de poemas software-based*
3. *Poesia sonora*, which highlights the importance of oral poetry.
4. *Poesia declamada*, pages where the authors themselves recite their works
5. *Nova poesia visual*, which some access through poetry and others through the visual arts.
6. *Poesia cinética*

Undoubtedly, Gache is a reference researcher/creator in this field, a pioneer in the Hispanic field of the study and creation of cybernetics. In her *Lecturas nómades*, a chapter - “Máquinas”- is devoted to a historical review of these artificially intelligent artefacts, from those imagined, as in Collodi’s Pinocchio, to today’s computers. But, above all, in this same chapter there is a

space called “poetry in codes”, where she identifies a series of common characteristics between poetic and mechanical language that would be the very essence of cyberpoetry:

It is located in a sphere of contamination and contagion between the dimension of the code and the literary text, writing also being understood as a code and defining both as sets of alphabetic signs.

The fact that it is impossible to distinguish machine-executable code from non-machine-executable code gives rise to code poems like Jodi’s, mimicking computer viruses (2006, p. 199).

If for the first section of “networked poetry” the debate (or one of them) was about the quality of the works; in the case of cyberpoetry, the discussion would be about whether we consider what we have before our eyes to be poetry, or something else. Just as stated earlier, its creators are undoubtedly heirs of the *avant-garde*, a time when the same debate took place. It was not only in poetry, they questioned art in general: painting, music. These movements eventually made a foothold in the history of art and literature in particular. Although in the virtual space the female presence is a minority, this gap is rapidly being closed (Borham-Puyal, 2019; Lozano-Marín, 2019).

Therefore, cyberpoetry is considered to be part of the new *Avant-Garde*, with its fascinating but difficult to assimilate aesthetics, which requires an important effort on the part of the receiver, an intentionality to unravel what the work in front of him offers. The language, the word, continues to be essential for the authors. For this reason, they defend the poetic, literary component of their productions. The “reader” is perhaps unaware of this prominence of the word, as all those other elements that accompany it, which frequently deconstruct it in order to recompose linguistic structures and other elements, take centre stage. But the step of this reader to become an author in these formats hardly takes place “because they assume they are not capable or because they feel they do not have the appropriate tools to do so” (Escandell, 2020, p. 101). It is because of this “lack of tools” that Escandell calls for more training for students who are interested in these works, but it is obvious that this requires more training for teachers in the same direction.

Martínez-Ezquerro and Quiles-Cabrera (2019) precisely deal with teacher training and describe specific practices of great interest for approaching different types of visual poetry and networked poetry. As for cyberpoetry, Gomes-Thomas and Santos e Silva (2017) propose precisely this need for a didactic approach through the work of Rui Torres, who approaches the Portuguese classics in his blog, where by means of textual engines it is possible to rewrite some poems “recreating them from the same syntagmatic axis but being able to perform countless combinations from words stored in a vast paradigmatic axis” (2017, p. 2).

As shown in the case of Gache, the creators are also aware of the need to be didactic in order to make these attractive but highly complex works accessible to everyone.

Conclusions

The theoretical review that has been the focus of this work leads us to some solid conclusions that show that the new digital contexts display unusual reading practices, as well as the exponential increase of poetry readers linked to the so-called Millennial Generation and

its successors. Maybe because they are theoretically perceived as minority realities -this perception is questioned by the number of sales of books considered to be poetry by these young authors-, they are still not a phenomenon that has been studied in sufficient depth, except by a few researchers (Sánchez-García, 2018a or Rodríguez-Gaona, 2019). Nevertheless, it is a very significant scenario, because it reveals a large group of young readers, and female readers above all, who are active and followers of poets who have decided to make themselves known through the web (Sánchez-García, 2018b).

This space for sharing where the first verses of the incipient writer appear, in an exposed and unashamed manner, and where he later asserts his word and personal voice, makes the reader feel a special empathy in the creative game, a sort of communion in which, with his or her comments, likes, the active reader feels that his word has a certain transcendence, is part of something and helps the author to build a work, to make it a reality, a work that he can see on paper and that he can browse through in his hands.

It is clear from all that has been said in the previous pages that this reader can also find a radically new space in another type of ground-breaking writing, which goes far beyond the dissemination via the internet of texts that can later be put on paper. Faced with this, what has been called “cyberliterature”, “cyberpoetry”, “digital poetry”, etc., offers a new form of eclectic creation, which necessarily requires the most up-to-date technological means, without which it cannot exist (Koskimaa, 2007; Morales, 2013; Escandell, 2019), whose keys to production and reading are extremely complex but which contribute to spreading interest in the word, in art among a young reader who feels comfortable in these spaces that he believes are reserved in some way for himself (Corral-Cañas, 2012).

With the conceptual definition of the two terms: cyberliterature and networked literature, we have established an epistemological framework based on which we will have to start when considering a new pedagogical model for literary education. Knowledge of these two realities of modern poetic creation is beginning to be discovered as a leverage for the promotion of reading and writing among our children and young people. In the light of the research, the process of creation and reception of poetic works has been substantially transformed in this digital era, and these changes have taken the form of a substantial increase in the number of readers who approach poetic texts, which implies the need for a broader literacy, a multi-literacy that the mediator must be capable of fostering in this reader in formation.

It is also a matter of these readings becoming “habits,” of continuity and of giving reading a value in itself (Yubero et al., 2009), and of proposing, in the interrelationship fostered by the digital platform itself, a place of confluence between reading and writing that strengthens this approach to poetry and literary language (Martínez-Ezquerro, 2019a) inside and outside the classroom (Cordón, 2016; Sánchez-García & Yubero, 2016).

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Notes

- 1 Can be accessed via the following link: <http://moebio.com/santiago/bacterias/>
- 2 Can be consulted at: <http://revistacaracteres.net/poesia-en-red-y-ciberpoesia/>
- 3 It can be consulted at: <http://revistacaracteres.net/poesia-en-red-y-ciberpoesia/que-es-ciberpoesia/>