

*An Achievement of the Round-Robin Approach:  
Temps Obert v 11.1 Reaches the One-year Milestone*

**Pedro Fernández Dorado**

**Copyright©2014 Pedro Fernández Dorado. This text may be archived and redistributed both in electronic form and in hard copy, provided that the author and journal are properly cited and no fee is charged.**

One of the usual tasks of traditional researchers involves the creation of labels that situate their work within the otherwise infinite pool of knowledge constructed by mankind. Their tendency has often been to dissect this knowledge in small and carefully shaped pieces that meet the requirements of a specific field. This propensity to individualize areas of study is beneficial to a certain degree and completely justified in moments when academic practice is shifting towards new forms of knowledge. However, as internalized in the general practice as this process may be, it can come at a price in the exceptional times we are currently witnessing, with the Humanities experiencing a massive transformation driven by the Digital Age.

The price I am referring to is the loss of qualitative research production as a result of an excessive fragmentation of knowledge into emerging study areas. I came to think of these dangers during a talk at [University College Cork](#) by Professor Enrique Santos Unamuno, from the [University of Extremadura](#). When talking about the multidisciplinary projects he is currently involved in, his exposition focused on highlighting the different skills that every contributor was adding to the overall project. Rather than labeling or restraining the scope of his work through new terminology, he employed existing notions taken from philology, cartography, computer science, philosophy, literary criticism amongst many others, and insisted on the need of all these fields to come together and collaborate amongst them.

In order for this collaboration to produce qualitative research, there is another necessary ingredient to the recipe: expertise. Through mastering their own field, researchers must excel while also becoming aware of their limitations when approaching other areas of knowledge. The aim is to seek the expert advice of other top researchers in these other disciplines, rather than unsuccessfully attempt the impossible task of becoming the ultimate interdisciplinary researcher who can master all subject areas.

Therefore, when we talk about Digital Humanities and its contribution to knowledge, I believe that, above all, we have to highlight its collaborative nature, its ability to put together experts on existing fields that are willing to create new forms of knowledge. But most importantly, we have to be really careful when defining or labeling new sub areas within the discipline, as this can also restrain the skills associated to them. In other

words, do the Digital Humanities search for a scholar who is an expert philologist interested in a collaboration with an expert on computer science, or do they want this scholar to be half proficient in computer science and half familiar with philological concepts?

Both scenarios are possible within the current definition of a *digital humanist*, but the question is which of them will produce the best research. The trend imposed by social media engines such as *Twitter*, which values quantity of information over quality, may be suitable for some aspects of a society shaped by the Digital Age, but when it comes to academia, epistemic integrity surely demands quality over quantity. In order to achieve this, collaboration amongst scholars in different areas of expertise is essential.

It was perhaps this same collaborative need, or even curiosity, which brought together some crime novel writers in the 1930's. Figures such as Agatha Christie and Ronald Knox united their creative efforts with other twelve writers from the so-called [Detection Club](#) and created works such as [The Scoop and Behind the Screen](#) or *The Floating Admiral*, probably some of the first collaborative creative writing projects in history. Whereas the writing processes behind a literary work and a piece of research may differ considerably, these two practices may have more in common than what we think, as the level of expertise needed to succeed in a particular area of research can be compared to the level of specialization that a writer needs to achieve to succeed in a determinate literary genre.

My interest in this type of narratives is driven by the digital project based on Catalan author Manuel de Pedrolo: [Temps Obert v11.1](#), which started off as a web-based free interpretation of what many Catalan scholars call Manuel de Pedrolo's masterpiece, the novelistic cycle *Temps Obert*.

Manuel de Pedrolo (1918-1990) was a widely published Catalan writer, whose 1974 novel *Mecanoscrit del segon origen* became one of the most read Catalan works of the 20th Century. He was also the most prolific writer during and after Franco's 40-year-long totalitarian regime, probably the darkest moment in Catalan history. By producing more than 150 works in a time when speaking and writing in Catalan was prohibited in Catalonia, Pedrolo became a key figure in the revitalization and promotion of Catalan literature and culture.

*Temps Obert* is an ambitious novelistic cycle that not only exemplifies Pedrolo's experimental narrative techniques, but also stands out as his literary manifesto. With this cycle, Pedrolo tried to approach the idea of "novela total" through an eleven-book cycle. The first volume of the cycle, *Un camí amb Eva* (Temps Obert 1) introduces the reader to Daniel Bastida, a character who grows up in the midst of the civil war and is brought up by a middle class Catalan family in Barcelona.

Through the other 10 books in the collection, Pedrolo will then showcase a range of parallel narratives, created by the introduction of slight changes in the original plot in some cases, or mainly modifying the point of view from which the story is told in others. The stories, with Daniel Bastida as their main character, depict the postwar years' living conditions in Barcelona from a multi-angled perspective.

Our project *Temps Obert v. 11* starts as a new interpretation of Pedrolo's concept of "novela total", in which different writers write their own independent story in their own language, but collide every Monday with one of the texts being influential to the rest, and this role of influencer rotating every week.

When the project started back on January the 6<sup>th</sup>, 2014, it did so not only as a parallel and less academic project than my PhD on the author, in order to promote Pedrolo's works online, but also as a collaborative effort by a group of writers to put a project in common and turning it into a source of inspiration and motivation. After 11 months of activity and through the production of nearly 300 posts, the project is about to reach an impressive 120 thousand words, and it has turned out to be something completely different to what it initially was.

*Temps Obert v 11.1* is an interesting portrait of how collaborative writing works, and shows the extent to which the writing process can be influenced by induced thematic and time restrictions; its weekly contributions from five different writers in their different mother tongues exemplify how the plot and style of a narrative can be shaped by not only the collaborative nature of its production, but also the immediacy of publishing on an online platform. As any non-funded non-profit project, there have been ups and downs in the activity, but nothing different to the ups and downs in the production of the average writer. This small but heterogeneous corpus written in eight different languages can be a great source of how different languages function together and it is yet to be explored with a methodology that embraces its interdisciplinary nature.

To conclude, and going back to the title of this piece, it is quite interesting to see how words evolve to convey different meanings though time, and even more surprising how we immediately associate these meanings to mental images. Since the moment I learned that these collaborative literary experiments were called *Round-robin* stories, I can't help but imagine my four colleagues in the project as little fluffy robins chasing each other in circle, waiting for their weekly turn to write their four hundred words.

**Pedro Fernández Dorado** is a PhD Candidate at the College of Arts, Celtic Studies and Social Sciences in University College Cork, Ireland, holding a M.Res in Anglo-Catalan Studies from the same college and a BA in English Philology from Universitat de Barcelona. He currently works as a Catalan Language and Culture Lector at University College Cork, Ireland. His PhD project consists on drawing a digital literary-historical map to visually represent the relationship between the works of prolific Catalan writer Manuel de Pedrolo and the development of the Catalan national literary space during the second half of the 20th Century.