



THE UNED'S READING CIRCLE: SHARING VIEWS AND INSIGHTS IN A VIRTUAL ENVIRONMENT

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Summary

The Virtual Reading Circle was created at the Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia (UNED) in November 2007 to foster the appreciation and enjoyment of Spanish (including Catalan, Basque, and Galician) literature.

The UNED's Reading Circle attracted over 20,000 visitors during its first year of existence with live TV transmissions of active audience participation in interviews with famous authors.

In the UNED's Reading Circle forums, now offered in Open Course Ware available via Internet throughout the Spanish-speaking world, established literary figures engage in debate and discussion on suggested monthly readings. The aim is to promote enjoyment of reading and the sharing of views and insights.

This paper analyses the reasons for the surprising success of this initiative.

1. The UNED as a teaching institution

The UNED, created in 1972, is the largest public university in Spain. The UNED was founded following the principles of the British Open University and is now the main Spanish institution for distance and blended learning. Today the UNED has around 200.000 students scattered all over Spain in 60 associated centers where students have access to libraries, tutoring, and other learning resources. The UNED also has 12 associated centers in Europe, North and South America and the North of Africa. Around 1.500 full time lecturers in Madrid and 1.200 administrative officers supervise the teaching and organisation of more than 30 degrees and 15 doctoral programs. In addition, the UNED has 5.700 local tutors who help students with their studies in their associated centers. The UNED also has special programs for handicapped people and students in prison.

Apart from offering academic training in order to get degrees in higher education, the UNED has a number of cultural initiatives aiming at promoting cultural activities among students and staff such as: art competitions, film seasons, a choir, a chess tournament, etc. This institution plays an important role as a center of cultural activities in towns and cities with an associated center.

2. The UNED's Virtual Reading Circle

In November 2007 the UNED's Virtual Reading Circle was created with the aim of promoting reading among different members of this higher education teaching institution, that is, students, teachers and UNED employees.

A website was created containing some forums where participants could share their views on the books and post questions to other readers, to the specialist in charge of the forum, or even to the authors. Six different forums were created: *Actualidad literaria* (Current literature); *Clásicos* (Classical Spanish literature); *Mis lecturas* (My books); *Literatura catalana* (Catalan literature); *Literatura gallega* (Galician literature); *Literatura vasca* (Basque literature). Each of these forums has a tutor (*Tutor de Apoyo en Red*) who is in charge of encouraging participation by providing reading guides, answering questions and assisting participants in all possible ways.

It is worth mentioning that since June 2008 free access to anyone wanting to participate in the UNED's Reading Circle has been granted so that it is now Open Course Ware and anyone from anywhere in the world can access this website and make use of these free resources. The UNED's Reading Circle can be found at www.uned.es/clubdelectura. This reading circle has obvious implications for the spread of the Spanish culture and languages all over the world and the role it can now play in Latin American countries is especially noteworthy.

Some of the main aims of the UNED's Reading Circle are:

- to establish a reading habit
- to provide a context for discussion
- to promote reading fluency
- to encourage community development
- to promote the reading of literature not only in Spanish but also in Catalan, Galician and Basque
- to encourage reading habits for intellectual development
- to provide opportunities for social interaction and exchange of ideas

During its first eighteen months of existence, over 80 books have been read and commented on in our forums and thousands of participants have expressed themselves and presented their views on dozens of books. For the main forum –*Actualidad literaria*– 25 books have been suggested and commented; 24 books for –*Clásicos*–; 14 books for Catalan; 14 books for Galician; and 14 books for Basque. In January 2009, given the success of this initiative, a new forum for foreign literature has been created and 4 books have been read so far. (See appendix I for a complete list of books)

3. Related activities

Participation in the UNED's Reading Circle has been encouraged in a number of ways. Suggested monthly readings are posted on the UNED's main website and posters are printed and delivered to all 60 associated centers all over Spain. Two other related activities are monthly interviews with one of the authors whose works have been read and Literary routes to places in Spain that inspired literary works, or, in the case of Classical literature, where authors lived.

3.1. Interviews

Once a month an author whose book has been read is interviewed in Madrid, so readers have the chance to send them their questions. Readers can participate by sending questions to the appropriate forum which will later be taken to the interview, they can also attend the interview which always takes place in the UNED library (Escuelas Pías) or they can also follow the interview through internet and make direct questions as all interviews are

broadcast live on TeleUNED. Later, all these interviews can be watched as they are posted in the UNED's Reading Circle website. A literary critic is usually invited to run the interview and introduce the author. So far interviews of eleven famous authors have taken place with the authors answering all the questions asked by participants in the forums. For a complete list of interviewees see Appendix II.

3.2. Literary routes

Spain has a long literary tradition and the forum for classical literature has been very successful. In order to encourage participation and to relate literature to real places a series of literary routes have been organized to visit places that are closely related to the suggested monthly readings. These routes usually take two or three days and are arranged by the UNED's Reading Circle together with an associate center that hosts the event and provides activities such as literary readings, receptions, visits to historical buildings and relevant places, etc. The following are the literary routes which have taken place so far:

- "El Cid" literary route. Octubre 27th – 28th, 2007.
- "Mercé Rodoreda" literary route. March 29th – 30th, 2008.
- "Jorge Manrique, El Marqués de Santillana and his Romantic country su país románico" literary Route. April 19th – 20th, 2008.
- "Ruta a Cuenca: Arte contemporáneo and humanismo (Fray Luis de León)" literary route. June 21st – 22nd, 2008.
- "Ruta a Úbeda: San Juan de la Cruz and Antonio Machado" literary route. March 6th – 8th, 2009.
- "Rosalía de Castro and A. R. Castelao" literary route. March 28th – 29th, 2009.

4. Participation in the UNED's Reading Circle

Over the last year and a half UNED students and staff have participated actively in the different activities organized by the UNED's Reading Circle, especially sending their questions and comments to the forums. By way of example, in January 2009, 7.031 different people visited this reading circle, in February the number was 5.869 and in the first six days of March, 1.810.

These numbers show not only the high interest in this reading circle but also the potential it has for a large institution like the UNED. As already mentioned, the UNED's Reading Circle is now offered as Open Course Ware and that means that anyone in the world can access and participate in these literary discussions, as well as the 200.000 members of the UNED.

Summary

| | | | | |
|------------------------|---------------------|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Reported period | Month Mar 2009 | | | |
| First visit | 01 Mar 2009 - 00:00 | | | |
| Last visit | 06 Mar 2009 - 23:59 | | | |
| | Unique visitors | Number of visits | Pages | Hits |
| Viewed traffic * | 1810 | 2115 (1.16 visits/visitor) | 10817 (5.11 pages/visit) | 72709 (34.37 hits/visit) |
| Not viewed traffic * | | | 8364 | 9848 |

* Not viewed traffic includes traffic generated by robots, worms, or replies with special HTTP status codes.

Monthly history

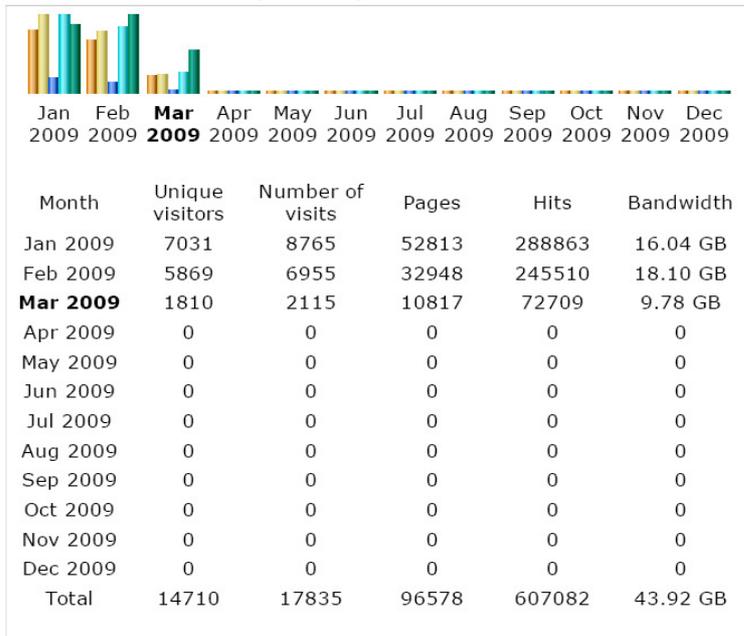


Figure 1: Participation in the UNED's Reading Circle from January 1st to March 6th, 2009.

5. Conclusions and implications for the future

The UNED's Reading Circle attracted over 20,000 visitors during its first year of existence. An active audience participated in interviews with famous Spanish authors and the UNED's Reading Circle Prize was given to the student that participated most actively, and which consisted of a set of books.

In the UNED's Reading Circle forums, now offered in Open Course Ware available via Internet throughout the Spanish-speaking world, established literary figures engage in debate and discussion on suggested monthly readings.

This reading circle has been conceived as an non-academic activity for leisure and to promote enjoyment of reading but it could have some other developments related to life-long learning programs recently established at the UNED. Senior students and alumni could eventually join reading circles in UNED's associated centers and follow the readings, interviews and literary routes suggested in the UNED's Reading Circle.

One of the key factors for the success of this activity is, we think, that participants can take part in an interesting and interactive cultural activity from their own homes, for free, and at any time of the day. So it is readily adaptable to all types of personal circumstances.

APPENDIX I

ACTUALIDAD LITERARIA:

November, 2007:

Rosa Montero: *La historia del rey transparente*.

Vicente Molina Foix: *El abrecartas*.

December, 2007 and January, 2008:

José Manuel Caballero Bonald: *Dos días de septiembre*.

Dulce Chacón: *La voz dormida*.

Enrique de Hériz: *Mentira*.

February, 2008:

Raúl Guerra Garrido: *La soledad del ángel de la guarda*.

Manuel Vázquez Montalbán: *El premio*.

March, 2008:

Clara Sánchez: *Presentimientos*.

Rafael Chirles: *Crematorio*.

April, 2008:

Juan Cruz Ruiz: *Ojalá octubre*.

Juan Marsé: *Ronda del Guinardó*.

May, 2008:

Carlos Franz: *Almuerzo de vampiros*.

Carlos Ruiz Zafón: *La sombra del viento*.

June, 2008:

José María Merino: *El lugar sin culpa*.

Juana Salabert: *El bulevar del miedo*.

July, August and September, 2008:

Eduardo Mendoza: *El asombroso viaje de Pomponio Flato*.

Luis Mateo Díez: *El sol de la nieve o El día que desaparecieron los niños de Celama*.

Jorge M. Reverte: *La batalla del Ebro*.

October, 2008:

Julio Llamazares: *Las rosas de piedra*.

November, 2008:

Manuel Longares: *Romanticismo*.

December and January, 2008-2009:

Enrique Vila-Matas: *Exploradores del abismo*.

February, 2009:

Lorenzo Silva: *La reina sin espejo*.

Juan Madrid: *Adiós, princesa*.

March, 2009:

Ana María Matute: *Paraíso inhabitado*.

José María Guelbenzu: *Un asesinato piadoso*.

CLÁSICOS:

November, 2007:

Poema de Mío Cid.

Benito Pérez Galdós: *Miau*.

December, 2007 and January, 2008:

Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer: *Rimas*.

Mario Vargas Llosa: *Conversación en La Catedral*.

Francisco de Rojas Zorrilla: *Del Rey abajo, ninguno*.

February, 2008:

Mercè Rodoreda: *La plaza del Diamante*.

Francisco de Quevedo: *Poemas escogidos*.

March, 2008:

Pío Baroja: *El árbol de la ciencia*.

Jorge Manrique: *Coplas a la muerte de su padre*.

April, 2008:

Marqués de Santillana: *Poesías completas*.

Camilo José Cela: *La familia de Pascual Duarte*.

May, 2008:

Fray Luis de León: *Poesías*.

Miguel Delibes: *Los santos inocentes*.

June, 2008:

Ernesto Sábato: *El túnel*.

Luis Martín Santos: *Tiempo de silencio*.

July, August and September, 2008:

Rafael Sánchez Ferlosio: *El Jarama*.

Fernando de Rojas: *La Celestina*.

October, 2008:

Ana María Matute: *Los hijos muertos*.

November, 2008:

Francisco de Quevedo: *El buscón*.

December and January, 2008-2009:

Juan Rulfo: *Pedro Páramo*.

February, 2009:

San Juan de la Cruz: *Poesías*.

Antonio Machado: *Campos de Castilla*.

March, 2009:

Max Aub: *Campo de los almendros*.

Larra: *Artículos*.

NUESTRAS CULTURAS:

November, 2007:

Catalán.- Llorenç Villalonga: *Bearn*

Gallego.- Rafael Dieste:

Vasco.- Gabriel Aresti: *Piedra y pueblo*

December, 2007 and January, 2008:

Catalán.- Quim Monzó: *Guadalajara*.

Gallego.- Álvaro Cunqueiro: *Merlín y familia*.

Vasco.- Jon Mirande: *La ahijada*.

February, 2008:

Catalán.- Ferrán Torrent: *Especies protegidas*.

Gallego.- Manuel Rivas: *Ella, maldita alma*.

Vasco.- Bernardo Atxaga: *Obabakoak*.

March, 2008:

Catalán.- Mercè Rodoreda: *Espejo roto*.

Gallego.- Alfonso R. Castelao: *Un ojo de vidrio*.

Vasco.- Harkaitz Cano: *El filo de la hierba*.

April, 2008:

Catalán.- Joseph Maria de Sagarra: *Vida privada*.

Gallego.- Carlos Casares: *El sol del verano*.

Vasco.- Anjel Lertxundi: *Línea de fuga*.

May, 2008:

Catalán.- Albert Sánchez Piñol: *La piel fría*.

Gallego.- Alfredo Conde: *Memoria de Noa*.

Vasco.- Unai Elorriaga: *Un tranvía en SP*.

June, 2008:

Catalán.- Jaime Cabré: *Señoría*.

Gallego.- Suso de Toro: *Trece campanadas*.
Vasco.- Jokin Muñoz: *Letargo*.
July, August and September, 2008:
Catalán.- Joan Sales: *Incierta memoria*.
Sergi Pàmies: *Si te comes un limón sin hacer muecas*.
Gallego.- Eduardo Blanco Amor: *La parranda*.
Inma López Silva: *New York, New York*.
Vasco.- Ramón Saizarbitoria: *Guárdame bajo tierra*.
Mariasun Landa: *Un cocodrilo bajo la cama*.
October, 2009:
Catalán.- Andreu Claret Serra: *El secreto del brigadista*.
Gallego.- Manuel Rivas: *El lápiz del carpintero*.
Vasco.- Aingeru Epaltza: *Cazadores de tigres*.
November, 2008:
Catalán.- Martí Domínguez: *El retorno de Voltaire*.
Gallego.- Xosé Antonio Neira Cruz: *El armiño duerme*.
Vasco.- Lourdes Oñederra: *Y la serpiente dijo a la mujer*.
December and January, 2008-2009:
Catalán.- Jesús Moncada: *Camino de Sirga*.
Gallego.- Álvaro Cunqueiro: *Cuando el viejo Sinbad vuelva a las islas*.
Vasco.- Koldo Izagirre: *Malandanzas de un Aguirre llamado Mecha*.
February, 2009:
Catalán.- Lluïsa Forrellad: *Fuego latente*.
Gallego.- Rosalía de Castro: *Cantares gallegos*.
Vasco.- Koldo Izagirre: *Malandanzas de un Aguirre llamado Mecha*.
March, 2009:
Catalán.- María Barbal: *Emma*.
Gallego.- Miguel Anxo Murado: *El sueño de la fiebre*.
Vasco.- Juan Cruz Igerabide: *Nos queda la ceniza*.

LITERATURA EXTRANJERA:

December and January, 2008-2009:
J. M. G. Le Clézio: *El atestado*.
J. M. G. Le Clézio: *El pez dorado*.
February and March, 2009:
Philip Roth: *Nuestra pandilla*.
Philip Roth: *La mancha humana*.

APPENDIX II

List of interviewees.

- **Rosa Montero**. November 23, 2007.
- **José Manuel Caballero Bonald**. January 17, 2008.
- **Raúl Guerra Garrido**. February 29, 2008.
- **Clara Sánchez**. March 26, 2008.
- **Juan Cruz Ruiz**. April 28, 2008.
- **Carlos Franz**. June 8, 2008.
- **José María Merino and Juana Salabert**. July 3, 2008.
- **Jorge M. Reverte**. September 30, 2008.
- **Julio Llamazares**. December 2, 2008.
- **Manuel Longares**. January 14, 2009.
- **Juan Madrid and Lorenzo Silva**. March 5, 2009.

