Heterotopias of the Digital Age: Reading Applications and Platforms

Drd. Irina RAȚĂ
Universitatea "Dunărea de Jos" din Galați

Abstract: *Today's literary landscape is greatly influenced by the 'explosion' of free reading platforms and applications, often complemented by the so-called self-publishing. These do not always offer carefully edited and/or revised works; all the while encouraging the publication of writings that can hardly constitute aesthetic models or good examples of practicing fiction. Whereas the term literature itself has become, starting with postmodernism, debatable, and perhaps, at times, too inclusive, it is contended here that certain aesthetic guidelines should still be abided by, in order to produce a literary work. While these applications and platforms can be regarded as heterotopic online spaces, helping their 'inhabitants' evade reality, they still trigger the discussion on what does or should constitute a literary text in this post-postmodern context. Especially, since these platforms and applications publish and perpetuate questionable content, and thus affect their readers' taste in the process. The aims of the current article are to discuss the impact of the technological progress on literature and its readers, employing such concepts as: literature, genre, canon, postmodernism, post-postmodernism, heterotopia and intertextuality.*

Keywords: *literature, postmodernism, heterotopia, intertextuality, literary genre*

The period we live in could possibly be considered the most challenging period of the last fifty years. It is characterised by an unprecedented health challenge in modern times, by the isolation of the quarantine, the losses of human lives. It therefore impacts our lives in unprecedented ways. Naturally, this is reflected in all areas of our lives, in our daily habits and even life choices. Since, more and more people were forced into using their electronic devices and the Internet for work and human contact; an increase in its usage, even with people that avoided it before, can be acknowledged. As a result, it also determined a visible increase in numbers of different applications and platforms, as an example - reading apps and platforms. Despite the fact that these are not in any ways new or innovative, coexisting with print books for almost two decades, their proliferation in the current circumstances is unparalleled, even if explainable on a certain level.

Reading platforms and applications emerged at the end of the twentieth century and slowly gained popularity at the beginning of the twenty-first century, with their users' numbers growing slowly, but steadily. Almost all publishing

houses these days offer print books along their electronic counterparts, whereas there are publishing houses that provide only digital content on certain imprints[1]. Traditionally published books are available in digital format in most bookshops and libraries, but also on such platforms as Google Books, Amazon, Kobo, Apple Books, etc. Some publishing houses also propose book apps[2] for mobile devices in different formats. However, among all of these digital imprints and digital versions of printed books produced by publishing houses, multiple reading apps and platforms, without any connection with publishing industry, that offer the so-called "free books" can be also found. While certain are just e-book versions of classic books that are free from copyright, as it expires somewhere between fifty and one hundred years after the author's death; others are just self-published works or user generated content, and even fan fiction; some also include pirated content.

In this context, the current article shall address such issues as the effects of the digital revolution on the publishing industry, authors, readers, literature in general; the specific traits of literature, as a genre; the evolution of the concept of literature and paraliterature and the influence of postmodernism on these concepts.

In order to begin the discussion on the effects of digitalisation on the publishing industry and all its actors in general, one should look first at its digital product which is the electronic book or e-book. Its origins are related to the first digital libraries and book repositories that were created for the purpose of book preservation and later for their easier distribution; as the first digital books were the computerised versions of print books, conceived for reducing costs of the books by sharing the existing resources (Deegan, Sutherland, 2009: 126). It permitted an easier cataloguing of books, conservation of rare books, an easier access to these by means of consulting their typed, scanned or photographed versions without risking damaging the original, as in the case of *Declaration of Independence* (digitalised in 1971)[3]. Following this book preservation movement adopted by libraries worldwide in the nineties, the publishing industry saw the opportunity to exploit it by launching electronic versions of the newly released books (Deegan, Sutherland, 2009: 100-104).

As a result, there was "intense speculation" about the future of the book, predicting "the death" of the printed book (Murray, 2018: 19), (Deegan, Sutherland, 2009: 91). Yet, printed books have not disappeared in the last ten

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[1] HQ Digital, Avon Impulse, Witness Impulse (Harper Collins): Loveswept & Flirt, Alibi, Hydra (Penguin Random House); Forever Yours (Hachette), etc.

[2] Dynamic Reader (Hachette UK), Volumes (Penguin Random House), etc.

[3] The first document included by Michael Hart in the Project Gutenberg was the typed version of the Declaration of Independence (McCrorey, 2012: 37-38).

years, nor seem they to be on the verge of extinction[4]; their numbers even seem to be increasing[5], as are book sales in general. The numbers of readers have also increased due to the people's isolation and augmented downtime, caused by the pandemic's influence on our lives. Moreover, the print book sales rose by 8,2 % in 2020, which is the largest annual increase since 2010.[6] The same can be said about e-book sales, which soared due to the Covid pandemic[7]. Nowadays, the two forms of books, print and e-book co-exist in this highly competitive market.

Both print books and e-books had to adapt to the readers' preferences and industry's evolution, but the most affected by the evolution of the publishing industry were the e-books and their characteristics. Even though e-books today feature a multitude of tools, features and elements, the current article does not intend to focus on the electronic text, as a hypertext (Deegan, Sutherland, 2009: 16-26). As according to Deegan and Sutherland: In electronic editions texts can be linked to notes, to variants, to other texts, even to graphics or sound or movies, or to themselves. Creating electronic research editions requires planning and considerably more work than scanning or keying a transcription of a printed version and providing some basic links (2009: 27).

These electronic editions enhance reader's experience by way of including multimedia, built-in dictionaries, word search tools, links towards online communities and forums. These require more resources and time than traditional books, as they contain hypertextual references and links.

For publishers, the adoption of electronic publishing has brought numerous advantages. First and foremost the diminishing of publishing costs for the electronic versions, which allowed the increase of the profit margin. These reduced costs determined the emergence of digital only imprints, like: HQ Digital, Avon Impulse, Witness Impulse (Harper Collins): Loveswept & Flirt, Alibi, Hydra (Penguin Random House); Forever Yours (Hachette), etc. Due to the advent of the *World Wide Web* and its continuous growth and expansion, the publishers have acquired numerous new digital practices, which also led to their increased online presence and visibility, reflected in sales, as well. They had to

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[4] "Why physical books still outsell e-books" – www.cnbc.com/2019/09/19/physical-books-still-outsell-e-books-and-heres-why.html [30.11.2020].

[5] Anderson, Porter (2020) "AAP's StatShot: US Trade Books Up 17.9 Percent in July, Year Over Year" in *Publishing Perspectives*, 10 September 2020 - https://publishingperspectives.com/2020/09/aaps-statshot-trade-books-up-17-9-percent-in-july-year-over-year-covid19/ [30.11.2020].

[6] https://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/industry-news/bookselling/article/85256-print-unit-sales-rose-8-2-in-2020.html

[7] https://goodereader.com/blog/e-book-news/ebook-sales-are-undergoing-a-revival-in-2020

adapt to the changing world of the internet, by developing websites, partnering with online booksellers, increasing their social media presence, exploiting new promotional tools (online book chats, online books clubs, etc.), and by creating reading apps, which allow collecting users' data and permit easier book sales (along with the publisher's website). In addition to the traditional income sources, one could mention the new avenues of income for the publishers available today, as - developing apps, through website clicks (via internet traffic - featuring of advertisements) and selling users' data, collected through customer loyalty programs. No wonder that all of these reflected in the flourishing of the publishing industry at the beginning of the twenty-first century[8]. However, all of the above include the disadvantage of having to permanently improve the websites and apps through updates and optimisation, the necessity to monitor users' interaction in order to block and eliminate the inappropriate content, etc.

The increase in book sales is also reflected in the growth of the book apps and online platforms, keen to profit from the latest evolution in the publishing trends. The profit potential of the newly appeared apps and platforms determined also the increase of the vanity publishing and the emergence of the outside industry apps and platforms, created by digital content creators. The former co-existed with the publishing industry for decades, having emerged in the early and mid-twentieth century, it evolved into a new model of publishing (Phillips, Bhaskar, 2019: 257), one that shall be addressed later on. Whereas the later appeared as a result of the industry's growth, in a bid to obtain financial gain ether from selling published content, pushing countless advertisements or from collecting and selling users' data to third parties, since these are considered to be the most valuable asset of any company[9]. Some of these creators use Pay Wall or subscription model[10] others use free model, with charges included, profiting from the pay per chapter system, where readers pay a small fee for every new chapter, from which 'writers' get a cut (Biersdorfer, 2017). These creators do exploit literary masterpieces no longer protected by copyright to attract potential customers, who have to provide access to their user data to install the app. Furthermore, aside from the numerous ads, which appear in the app and which are used as a revenue source, and aside from collecting users' information, these try to influence readers' choices and taste. Among the most usual tricks for hooking new readers, one could mention the illusion of abundance of new content, letting them browse it and offering free the first chapters, often ending in cliffhangers, only to make them subsequently pay for the continuation of the story. Although, some of these are used by self-published authors aiming to sell

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[8] More details in Banou (2016: 3).
[9] More details in Sharma et al (2020: 188).
[10] More on Pay Wall/subscription app models in Waldman (2011: 143).

their work and therefore are written and edited with much care, others are written by hired personnel (content farms writers/ content mills writers), and thus not all of these apps and platforms provide worthwhile content. Some of them feature fan fiction, others are filled with recycled ideas, following same tired patterns, clumsy writing[11] and even are riddled with grammatical errors[12]. The publishing industry has shaped public opinion for a long time, acting as a gatekeeper for upholding certain standards; however, the apps and platforms have lost this "physical identity and constraints" specific to the physical books, and thus they also lost "some of the properties and regulators that confer public status" (Deegan, Sutherland 2009: vii). These have shifted from the preoccupation with quality of the traditional publisher towards the preoccupation with quantity, which allows them obtaining greater financial gain.

While the price per chapter varies, it is always seemingly inconsequential, so as to trick users into paying it. This way users end up paying the price of a traditionally published e-book for a work of controversial or debatable content. Whereas the traditionally published books in electronic format undergo complex copy-editing, formatting, text composition, setting in type and printing, etc. processes (Deegan, Sutherland, 2009: 79), the online reading apps and platforms have lax guidelines or lack them altogether, containing plagiarised and unreviewed content.

Although the platforms and apps intended for/aimed at aspiring authors offer the possibility of an easy access to an online community, providing free readership and critique, necessary for every beginner, and therefore might be excluded from the current discussion; there are numerous apps allowing users to post their work, which is not intended for the improvement of the said work or reader's feedback, but for application or platform creator's profit. These provide platforms aimed at different target audiences in different genres. Most of these apps aim to address readers with a short attention span and a full schedule, be it teenagers and young adults that read in-between classes, or stay at home moms reading between chores. Unfortunately, their primary targets are female readers, as well as their primary authors[13], while males are the main target of gaming industry (Murray, 2019: 104). The social media nowadays is filled with ads for both reading and gaming.

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[11] For more details, please read - http://mediashift.org/2010/07/writers-explain-what-its-like-toiling-on-the-content-farm202/, https://www.makealivingwriting.com/write-content-mills-writers-true-stories/

[12] https://amazonauthorinsights.com/post/161308225145/a-question-about-poorly-edited-books-by-hugh

[13] As an example, the developer's description of one of these apps – https://download.cnet.com/Dreame-Read-Best-Romance/3000-20412_4-78139442.html

From a more general view, the large number of apps and platforms ensure the illusion of "infinite choice", which risks delivering "little of quality", as currently the internet "is awash with disinformation, misinformation, pornography, exhibitionism and rehashed gossip posing as serious news or even knowledge" (Deegan, Sutherland, 2009: 116-117). These large amounts of materials freely available do not actually give their readers a real choice, as all of them "lack expert evaluation and pre-selection, both functions of conventional publishing" (Deegan, Sutherland 2009: 117).

Whereas one would see the proliferation of reading apps as a major increase in readership/readers' numbers, it is not necessarily true. According to Zaid[14]: "Books are published at such a rapid rate that they make us exponentially more ignorant. If a person read a book a day, he would be neglecting to read four thousand others, published the same day. In other words, the books he didn't read would pile up four thousand times faster than his knowledge" (cited in Deegan, Sutherland, 2009: 92).

The above statement reflects the current state of publishing industry, but also the difficulty faced by new authors to get visibility and readers in this context, as larger number of works and greater numbers of authors mean little opportunity for exposure.

The advent of digital media has also brought other changes in the publishing industry, thus irremediably transforming the relationship between the industry, the author and his/her readers. For instance, it completely restructured the performance of authorial identity. Book publishers adapted and adopted new technologies and practices to increase authors' visibility and exposure. For instance, social media presence of authors and social media promotion of books by the way of book trailers and online book clubs offer these books a better visibility, which in its turn increases the book sales. However, these are mostly employed for well established authors, who are able to attract large readership, rather than beginners.

Aside from the traditional book tours, writers' festivals, published interviews with authors, etc. establishing the author's online presence has become a part of the new digital practices. An example of such new practices applied for book promotion can be considered the case of the popular YA author - John Green. His YouTube channel the Vlogbrothers, established in 2007, has allowed him to build an online community – Nerdfighters, allowing him to reach an international readership and form a large fan base (Murray, 2018: 38). Other authors, like Margaret Atwood, Stephen King, Neil Gaiman or J.K. Rowling, etc. prefer Twitter for the communication with their readers, although for example

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[14] Zaid, Gabriel (2003). *So Many Books: Reading and Publishing in an Age of Abundance*. Philadelphia, PA: Paul Dry Books, p. 22.

Gaiman has got also an author's blog and J.K. Rowling has got an author's website. It allows the readers the illusion of private communication with their favourite authors, and thus creates a connection that more often than not ends up reflecting in the sales of their works. As Murray puts it:

> "Now the author is engaged in one-to-many or even one-to-one real-time relationships with readers, providing updates on the progress of writing projects, plugging future in-store or media appearances, intervening in current political or cultural debates, passing judgment on the work of other writers (whether established or novice), and selectively endorsing, correcting, or otherwise mediating reader discussions of their work." (2018: 12).

This relationship nevertheless could be a time-consuming task, which determines authors like Neil Gaiman to take periodic breaks from social media in order to write[15].

Murray identifies three stages of altering authorial perception in the current digital media proliferation period: the disintermediation, the interactivity and the para-sociality (Murray, 2018: 29). The disintermediation is "the ability of (would-be) authors to publish, publicize, and sell their work without the gatekeeper approval of mainstream media arbiters (agents, publishers, marketers, publicists, and retailers)" (Murray, 2018: 29). It represents the desire of the self-published author to forego the industry intermediaries and to build a direct relationship with his or her readers, visible in the increasing numbers of self-publishing apps and platforms, authors' blogs and vlogs. When it comes to interactivity, it refers to "the possibility of rapid or even real-time interaction with readers irrespective of their geographic location, and publicly accessible archiving of such interactions" (Murray, 2018: 29). It includes reader-fan participation, in the form of the relationship between the authors and his or her beta readers, and also readers' participation on the author's blog posts and vlogs. As for the para-sociality, it refers to the "author-reader para-social pseudo-intimacy", represented by "the nature of the intimate authorial revelation", which is "always profoundly asymmetrical, with an individual author communicating to any number of typically unknown and unseen online followers, who are themselves typically unknown to and unseen by each other" (Murray, 2018: 30).

Although present in traditional publishing, as well, the above characteristics are especially evident in self-publishing. It has developed from the

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[15] Lea, Richard (2013) "Neil Gaiman prepares for social media 'sabbatical'", *The Guardian*, 14 June 2013 - www.theguardian.com/books/2013/jun/14/neil-gaiman-social-media-sabbatical [26.11.2020].

so-called "vanity publishing" that consisted of publishing anything and everything as long as it was paid in full by the author. It also is a stress free, responsibility free experience for the publisher, as the author takes all the risks. The traditional vanity publishing used conventional publishing technologies, except for the review and marketing processes (Deegan, Sutherland, 2018: 114). Today, self-publishing is the evolved vanity publishing, but also a new publishing model, as it "has come to replace the publisher's and literary agent's slush pile of unsolicited manuscripts as the unofficial research and development (R&D) arm of print publishing" (Murray, 2018: 33). As the book market today is overflowing with countless new titles, the self-published authors have to innovate, try different tactics and techniques, in order to stand out and attract readers. In the traditional publishing model it is the publisher's task, although more and more the publishing industry delegates the job to their authors and relies on already established readership for the new published authors; as can be seen in the case of Beth Reekles[16] or Abigail Gibbs[17].

The pressure of the current market is making the discussion around quantity vs. quality extremely poignant, especially in the self-publishing area. Since, when it comes to self-published authors, these fall into one of the two categories, either they try to write the best book they can, ensuring it is well edited and proofread, but they do not make a living out of it; or they try to write as much as they can in order to ensure a living out of writing and in this case, the quality has to suffer.

The above discussed context affects the readers as well. Some of the effects are positive for the readers, as for example is the increased authorial presence, giving the impression of an on-going relationship between the readers and the writer. It is reflected in the readers' participation in book promotion and in the increased involvement of readers in fandoms, book clubs, book sites, blogs, offering encouragement and feedback to their favourite authors. These spaces of readers' involvement represent safe spaces, in which users create alter egos for their participation in the online communities inhabiting those spaces. These online sites, fandoms and communities are hypertextual[18] spaces blurring the barriers between the writer and the reader, making the reader the "producer

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[16] *The Kissing Booth* had over nineteen million reads on Wattpad, when the author was offered a publishing deal by Penguin Random House - https://www.booktrust.org.uk/news-and-features/features/2017/october/from-writing-online-to-a-publishing-deal-six-wattpad-sensations/.

[17] *The Dark Heroine* had over seventeen million reads on Wattpad, when the author was offered a publishing deal by HarperCollins - https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/fangs-for-the-six-figure-book-deal-vampire-tale-is-coup-for-teenager-dgqk0qmnf8r

[18] Hypertext - term originating from Roland Barthes' *S/Z* (1970).

of the text" (Barthes, 1974: 4), transforming "any document that has more than one link into a transient center" (Landow, 2006: 57). These websites and platforms function as hypertextual links in a hypertextual network, connecting textual and paratextual features, as supplementary information, author's personality traits and biography, miscellaneous data related to the creation of the literary work, other readers' input, etc. and thus creating the illusion of "augmented" reality, allowing a multidimensional experience and interpretation. These interactions and increased authorial presence lead to a better understanding of the writing process, which in its turn leads to an increased number of readers joining online writing communities, as Wattpad, Camp NANOWRIMO, The Writers Chat Room, Storyaday, Fictionaut, Critique Circle, etc. A large number of currently published authors, traditionally or self-published, started as a part of an online community, like those mentioned above[19].

The isolation and downtime brought by current pandemic only increased readers' participation. The websites, platforms and apps allowing these interactions also constitute online heterotopic spaces or heterotopias[20], which, according to Foucault, are "counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted" (1984: 3). These spaces can be identified according to the six characterising principles developed by Foucault (1984: 4-9). According to Foucault, these places usually deal with people with deviant behaviour in relation to the norm (1984: 4-5). When it comes to digital spaces these have to deal with such phenomena as trolling, bullying, mature and graphic content, therefore needing moderating. These also have a "precise and determined function within a society", according to the synchrony of the culture (Foucault, 1984: 5) and they seem to juxtapose "several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible" in a single virtual space (Foucault 1984: 6). They also seem to function in "an absolute break with their traditional time" (Foucault 1984: 6), as people interacting on the site live in different time zones. The last feature of a heterotopic space is the one making it function on a basis "of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them penetrable"; it is a characteristic of platform access, related to the online user accounts and specific to apps installation (Foucault 1984: 7). Also, aside from their six main traits these also function in relation with all the remaining

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[19]   Some   examples   -   https://www.booktrust.org.uk/news-and-features/features/2017/october/from-writing-online-to-a-publishing-deal-six-wattpad-sensations/

[20] Heterotopia – term originating from Michel Foucault's lecture *Of Other Spaces* (1967).

space. This function operates between two opposite poles, reality and illusion. The reality heterotopias are meant to create a space of illusion which exposes "all the sites inside of which the human life is partitioned" (Foucault 1984: 8). The illusion heterotopias are meant to create an "other" space, a real space, which is as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged space as ours is messy and imperfect. Therefore, the online websites, fandoms, forums and platforms that allow users interaction and content creation function as in-between spaces, similar to the heterotopia of the boat, where the boat is "a floating piece of space", "a place without a place", and "the greatest reserve of imagination" (Foucault, 1984: 9). And therefore they represent sites of hyperreality[21] of communication and meaning, "more real than the real" (Baudrillard, 1994: 81), since they illustrate "a simultaneity of all the functions, without a past, without a future, an operationality on every level" (Baudrillard, 1994: 78). All the interactions, posts, replies, illustrations, contributions, etc. co-exist in the same virtual space, allowing to the reader to escape his everyday reality into an alternative one, where he or she can interact with others, using their alter egos, escaping the ties of the duties, tasks and restrictions, but also fear, stress and isolation of the real world during pandemic.

Having discussed above the changes and challenges brought by the digital evolution for the publishing industry, the authors and readers, one should return to the notion of quality of published works and to the concept of literature in general. It has been addressed from multiple points of view, as a cultural concept[22], a cultural form[23], as the equivalent of literary fiction[24], thus a genre, or as a representation of high culture (Murray, 2018: 17). **According to Rexroth, literature is** a "body of written works. The name has traditionally been applied to those imaginative works of poetry and prose distinguished by the intentions of their authors and the perceived aesthetic excellence of their execution"[25]. This aspect of aesthetic excellence and aesthetic superiority is what usually is considered as the differentiating trait of literature in comparison with genre fiction and paraliterature. However, today's literary landscape is the result of paradigm changes brought by postmodernism, which integrated popular literature

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[21] Hyperreality – term origination from Jean Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981).

[22] Literature – as a cultural concept, explained in Peter Widdowson's *Literature* (1999).

[23] Literature - as a cultural form, presented in Raymon Williams' *Writing in Society* (1983).

[24] Idea advanced by Ken Gelder in *Popular Fiction. The logics and practices of a literary field* (2004).

[25] Rexroth Kenneth, *Literature,* Encyclopedia Britannica, https://www.britannica.com/art/literature [06.12.2020].

genres, by blurring the boundaries between high and low culture, by mixing fiction with reality and ambiguity in a temporal disorder, by continuously challenging conventions, pushing boundaries and defying authority, through its non-linear thinking and its mixing of genres and styles. Innovation and change were welcomed, as well as, experimenting with language, emphasizing the relationship between reality and intertextuality (Plett 1991: 12). As a result, literature as a concept went through a devaluation stage during postmodernism, its own essence being challenged, the term successively being applied to a larger body of texts combining literary fiction and genre fiction.

In this resulting complex landscape, the large body of texts produced on a regular basis, through traditional publishing, self-publishing, countless platforms and apps is not necessarily conforming to the aesthetical guidelines or traits that characterise literature, as a genre. According to Rosmarin, genre is "our most reasoned way of talking about and valuing the literary text" (1985: 39). The characteristics that define aesthetically a literary text analyse it "in terms of the text's "feel" of uniqueness, particularity, and richness; in terms of an indwelling order, which is itself variously defined, being at times an "organic" unity, at times a syllogistic logic, at times an "uncanny" illogic" (Rosmarin, 1985: 37). While this statement may appear excessively vague, beautiful prose and style are recognised by almost any reader, without resorting to identification of certain fixed traits of the text. And nowadays literary context provides countless texts for reader's evaluation, hence Murray's statement that:

> "(...) the digital literary sphere presents an unparalleled, real-time laboratory for examining "literature" not as a preexistent, aesthetically determined category, but as a denomination of cultural value in the act of being brokered by a fluid assemblage of highly disputatious and sometimes fiercely contentious cultural agents. "Literature" thus represents not the simple acknowledgment of a work's always present (if at times misperceived) aesthetic superiority, but rather the veteran's medal of having successfully navigated a hazardous terrain of valorising and consecrating authorities. In a manner perhaps highly discomforting to traditional literary studies self-conceptions, "literature" to a large extent becomes what the digital literary sphere deems to be literature"
> (2018: 20).

Nevertheless, as observed above, literature as a term has lost its value and either is used as a synonym for literary fiction or as an all inclusive, umbrella term, including popular literature genres alongside literary fiction. Traditionally, genre literature has been also titled paraliterature, which according to Suvin, is "a literature that is really read - as opposed to most literature taught in school" (1979: vii). This opens another debate on the topic of what is really read

nowadays, and also includes genre fiction in the category of popular literature. When Suvin has used the term paraliterature, he considered it as derogatory for genre fiction, which in his opinion can be also "aesthetically significant" (1979: vii). Although, this statement referred specifically to SF, same can be stated in relation to some great works of genre literature, which are not considered necessarily belonging to said genre today, but rather to the classics of literature. As an example, Dickens' *Oliver Twist, Great Expectations* or *David Copperfield* were published in serialized form, being considered at the time popular literature; Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* should be seen as children's literature, yet they are seen as classics. What these and other classic works have in common is withstanding the test of time, because the sole criterion of popularity is not sufficient for attesting the quality of a literary work. The works that tend to not be affected by the passage of time, usually are the ones recognized by their readers as being "aesthetically significant". There are multiple instances in literary history of "popular genres" that have not stood the test of time, like popular gothic serial productions - *penny dreadfuls* (1830-1933) or popular science fiction – *pulp magazines* (1896-1950), or even *dime novels* (1860-1926). If one looks at today's publishing landscape, there are instances of works, which are really popular (in terms of their sales), but which would never be considered literature by their readers, same can be stated in relation to certain online platforms and apps, like Hooked, Quinn, Gonewild (audio), Deapsea, Dreame, Galatea, etc. The boundaries between genres in current publishing medium are not as clear as one would expect, and genre fiction, often dismissed as formulaic, surprises its readers oftentimes with its aesthetic value; at the same time not all literary fiction has the aesthetic traits necessary to be considered literature.

Paraliterature, in the current environment, is rather a category which includes works wildly popular at a certain point in time, but which lack the necessary traits to be considered literature and to pass the test of time; while the greater category of literature includes any beautifully written, aesthetically pleasing text containing compelling storytelling, or innovative and original work of a great complexity, that is perceived as worthy, by different generations of readers. Seen from this perspective, paraliterature as a genre has been omnipresent in every literary period, having no lasting effect on further literary creation. It can be identified at present in certain traditionally published works, but also in the texts published on various apps and platforms, which are a byproduct of literary evolution. As menacing as these may seem for literature as a concept today, previous experience has thought us that these are fads subjected to the readers' preferences and whims. Readers' taste and knowledge are developed through reading, therefore, a more extensive reading also involves a greater capacity to distinguish between the aesthetical worth of literary texts.

Critics and writers should probably trust more their readers' capacity to discern between literary and paraliterary text, since the attempt to impose writing standards could be interpreted as being unethical, representing an attempt to censure the freedom of speech and to control the narrative.

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