

LITERATURE AND INTERNET – DIVERGENCIAS AND CONCILIATION

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Abstract: The internet constitutes a fictional medium, broadly speaking, and no one doubts of this characteristic as it concerns the literature. Thus, even a kind of unity link does not exist yet between these two modalities, in fact there are some dissociations/ divergencies, because the world of internet has the supremacy, disposing of auxiliary, technologic, superior possibilities, from the old tehne to tehnoology being a notable distance. On the other hand, those who declare that printed books are deceased, and implicately, the literature, find themselves in error, because the e-literature is only a reminiscence of the traditional forms. Finally, between the battle of literature with internet, and their conciliation, the last will be decisive.

Keywords: *literature, internet, literacy, literacity, conciliation.*

1. From Literacy to Literacity

Considering the fact that the internet is a medium-scale and somewhat largely fictional, in the broad sense of the word, it should at least be a connection between it and the literature itself. Yet lately, because the Internet has multiple technological dimensions, being able to a certain syncretism, and of a specific kind of intrusion into reality, it actually becomes a competitor to the written literature. However, there are still enough followers or nostalgic of the books on paper that considers the inclination towards reading, literally and figuratively, therefore offers an added value, attractiveness and excitement, a plaisir du texte unmatched by any other way, the death of the book as a cultural object being declared so early. There is, on the other hand, a new notion, that of literacity (literacidad) which is comprehensive for the reader's ability (average or specialist) to browse electronic journals, blogs, or digital scholarly articles. However, when the so-called circulated literature on the internet respects too little the claims of the genuine literature (sometimes even making abstraction of literacy – in terms of the minima grammar rules or spelling) or when the author is lacking, the question is which of the two ways (literature / acknowledged volume or web literature / internet culture will ultimately have an impact on readers? This paper is trying to answer these questions, and especially to find a way of conciliation between the old culture of the book on the library shelf and the new proliferation of virtual environments of the Internet.

From Gutenberg galaxy to the digital clutter (World Wide Web) more than five centuries have passed, and some people say that the world of knowledge has expanded, but equally narrowed, the rest of them believe. It seems that about 83% of the world population still does not use the Internet, according to a press release from the European Computer Driving Licence Foundation. Behold, there still must not be the concern that the printed volumes will disappear anytime soon... Nobody doubts the things of enlightenment through the written book. While in the past centuries the transition from the manuscripts to the printed scientific works was difficult, only a minority elite having initial access to the latter, until the nineteenth century, with large-scale circulations (and even the jump made into a single century by the written literature to the electronic media is huge), a similar phenomenon is

happening with the Internet itself, which is at the dawn of its existence, and which will dramatically likely evolve over the next decades. On this three-coordinate axis three categories of receptors must be identified and, not just the elite and beginners, but a middle class, who would be called wanderers, those who aspire to move from subculture to culture without having any necessary and sufficient tools. So between surfing the internet and stranding on the internet is not far away...

Within this context, “La literacidad puede definirse como el conjunto de competencias que hacen hábil a una persona para recibir y analizar información en determinado contexto por medio de la lectura y poder transformarla en conocimiento posteriormente para ser consignado gracias a la escritura. Está mediada por un reconocimiento y comprensión básicamente del lenguaje, pero además de ello, de los roles y dinámicas del lector y el escritor, como interlocutores en un contexto determinado”.¹ (Literacy can be defined as the set of skills which gives a person the ability to be able to absorb and analyze information leading to a context through reading and to be able to turn it into knowledge through basically recognition and language comprehension, but even more, of the roles and dynamics of reader and writer, as interlocutors in a determined/given context – translation mine). In other words, this notion, which comes from the English word Literacy, i.e. coming from the condition of the man of letters, in a broad sense, refers to the ability to constructively interact with any culturally marked symbolic system.

A difference between literacy and this notion is thus required, which goes beyond mere literacy, traditionally limited to decoding, since the last refers to “an inseparable combination of “decoding-comprehension operations” and to “a separate decoding comprehension”² where literacy ultimately remains associated with the first operation (decoding) and literacy with the second operation (comprehension), the difference being only a heuristic one. On the extent which this concept deepens, it could be found out that it is subordinated to a kind of know-how regarding the various code systems and languages of social networks, i.e. Facebook – writing out the alphabet, numbers, icons or body language, among many others. Indeed, to the literature on paper, which gave some privacy, in a broad sense, the Internet culture has a predominant social issue, so we can talk in this case of a socio-literature. On the other hand, the e-literate may lose direct communication skills, once attention is focused on mediated communication web connection. Some blogs or websites allow “literary publication” without author, purpose, or spelling... so a return to anonymity, to alliteration, to the art for art sake. The dangers that lurk the internet democratization refer therefore to the proliferation of ignorance, paradoxically, through the so-called culture, to the multiplication of the illiterate people, for the sake of a new digital encoding that differ from the traditional channels, to relativism in literature. „Esto incluye sus sintaxis o reglas para operar para su uso efectivo, e inclusive para su transgresión creativa. Para realizar determinadas tareas, las personas emplean sistemas de decodificación en unas coordenadas de tiempo, espacio y cultura, para obtener determinados objetivos predeterminados por la misma tarea”³. (This includes syntaxis or rules to operate for an effective use, and for the creative

¹ <https://es.scribd.com/doc/87131473/Definicion-de-l-literacidad>, accessed on October 6, 2014.

² <http://memoriasdeorfeo.blogspot.ro/2012/03/literacidad-alfabetismo-y-sociedad.html>, accessed on October 3, 2014.

³ <https://es.scribd.com/doc/87131473/Definicion-de-l-literacidad>

transgression. In order to realize determined tasks, the persons implement systems of decodification in certain coordinates of time, space and culture, for obtaining specific objectives predetermined by the same task – translation mine).

2. The ambivalence of the relation *literature* – *internet*

We also need to consider, that by the way of the Internet, in terms of literature, kind of new trends coagulate, other literary manifestoes come into being, some promoters of cultural ideas, even literary movements or sui generis genres (as the literary blog aspire to become) by similar methods that all were formed because of written books. Here, comes the problem of preserving the autonomy of literature, because the Internet, with its many possibilities, requires a kind of syncretism never seen before, illustrate the meaning of the written text, even electronically, with some plastic creations more or less successful, original or taken from others, and even kinetic image / video microfilms attached to the creation itself to be more convincing. „The concept of autonomy is inextricably bound to the problem of freedom. A different relationship between individual and community has emerged since the subject has become autonomous. Whereas until early modern times the cosmic order furnished the guiding principle, since about 1800 the subject more and more determines itself and its relation to the world. The autonomy of modern literature is an umbrella term for the myriad ways of imagining the ‘space’ of freedom. Outside fiction, the freedom of the subject almost immediately clashes with that of other subjects, with nature or with the limitations of the subject itself. In art and literature, on the other hand, freedom is feasible, whereby fiction, the game played with the delicate positions of the subject in the real world, becomes the embodiment of the idea of freedom”.⁴ For the first time, Roman Jakobson introduced the concept of literarity (*literaturnost*) in the 1921 definition which he stated that “the subject of literature is not the literature, but literarity that is what makes a literary work from a given work.”⁵ Between literature and *literaturnost* there are infinitesimal shades less perceptible than between literacy and literacity.

Turning to the relationship between literature and internet „La literatura y el internet tienen una relación de amor y odio. Mientras algunos proclaman la muerte de los libros (...), gritan y desprecian los ebooks, otras personas simplemente se fascinan por las facilidades que el internet ha traído (...).”⁶ = Literature and the Internet maintain a relationship of love and hate. While some personas proclame the death of the books (...), shouting and despising the ebooks, other are simply fascinated by the facilities which internet imposes – translation mine.

The tangible benefits of using the Internet, of digital reading, allow the following:

- to increase or decrease the contrast of the letters so as to be in compliance with visual acuity, or the time of day, or the orientation of the light;
- to have the page vertically or horizontally;

⁴<http://blog.hum.uu.nl/nederlands/files/2013/11/Symposium-The-Ethics-of-Literary-Autonomy-6-7-feb-final.pdf>, accessed on October 4, 2014.

⁵ Apud Adrian Marino, *Biografía ideii de literatură*, III, Editura Dacia, 1994, p. 32.

⁶<http://cuadrivio.net/2010/08/clasicos-y-no-tan-clasicos-tropezos-en-la-historia-de-una-interpretacion-ideal/>, accessed on October 7, 2014.

- to re-arrange the text and to recalculate the number of pages of that writing starting from the font size and format;
- to go through the interactive text, jumping from a quote to the bibliography or footnotes, including to stop reading and turn the page as desired;
- to mark using different styles and defaults any text fragment and be assigned to a certain category (important phrases, language mistakes, faulty translation, unfamiliar words);
- to make annotations and comments on the text, and to be kept in other electronic documents;
- to look for different words or phrases and to navigate through all the raised fragments or comments.

Indeed, all these are not possible (or they are more difficult) in written literary works, unless other auxiliary tools are used, like reading files, so other work support. However, the Internet promotes quantity more instead of quality, meaning that there are more sources, more information (the latest), faster access, therefore a broad deployment particularly horizontally, while the classic reading calls for deepening knowledge to a more carefully choice of the relevant literature and to an appropriate synthesis.

In other words, “the fall of the Gutenberg era corresponds to an increasingly visible syndrome of its “administrators” isolation. Even the residual function of rhetorician or the public figure of the critic is challenged. The new virtual intellectual (if he can be called like this) is not a “custodian of speech”, he does not have the function of social mediation. In the new reality, mediation is limited; the access to the “speech” is in general open to all. The e-literate can not speak only in his/her own name and his/her address may not be the canonical form of the old criticism.”⁷ – translation mine. Without authority, critic, or spelling, what kind of freedom would be required more? But as such the literature remains in its authentic content ... Indeed the institution of literary criticism in the traditional sense, is almost extinct. Nowadays the postmodern critique is limited to a catalyst based function between public and writing, some people identifying it with the kind of PR between author and reader. And here comes the quantity, meaning that the number of readers is significant and ideally higher than that of the authors or critics (together), then the preferences of those who read (e-readers!) require critical assessments, in a minimalist style (comments on the literary blogs or on Facebook), in a reverse way than it was previously. Thus, a reversal of the usual triad produces: tastes (aesthetic) – judgment – ideal (aesthetic), so the values are changing too.

In 2012, in his latest volume, *La civilización del espectáculo*, Mario Vargas Llosa predicted the demise of culture and the intellectuals’ twilight, thinking to the fierce technologizing of the media/ channels of communication and cultural information transmission. However, we must plead for the reconciliation between the internet and literature, because they are to some extent interdependent. There are, for example, literary blogs (creative, critical or journalistic), on the other hand, there is a literary, poetic or rhetorical dimension, even in non-literary blogs. The blog becomes a combination of diary,

⁷ <http://metacritic.wordpress.com/2010/02/25/la-the-good-literature -SCH-a-go-radical />, accessed on October 5, 2014.

card, photo album, socializing hall, individual newspaper and meetings agenda. (i.e. Linkterature or Cyberculture Studies).

We are now witnessing a phenomenon where the Internet becomes itself the subject of literature, or vice versa, as I mentioned before, literature is built on the Internet. The clear advantages of the Internet are that the price of the written volumes is prohibitive for the average reader and electronic books (e-books) are widely available. Among other advantages are the space (memory) occupied by these e-books, which is very low, all the books ever written in the world could be stored on a bigger hard drive. To counter the negative view of the direct reading on the monitor, the solution to a different type of display called eInk (e-ink or “electronic ink”) was found, which induces an image similar to the printed book, reducing eye problems caused by other types of monitors. However, electronic writing is sometimes a chance for the less known writers. “The e-book seems to be the future of literature. But this future requires the support of two major props: the faster development of technologies that allow them to be read in a way as natural as reading a normal book and the establishment of a distribution channel to eliminate intermediaries (agents, publishers etc.) between an author and his audience.”⁸ – translation mine.

3. The conciliation between literature and internet

Here comes the reconciliation (yet virtual!) between literature and the internet, because they both need to work together, not to undermine each other. However, there should be also the institution of the critic, in one form or another, referring to the written texts on the Internet, to discern between good or even acceptable yields, and the rest of electronic scrap. Nowadays, “A good writer will actually be able to keep an audience’s attention. This is key and it is the essence of style” and there is also a kind of traditional literature atomization, because the speed century induces a certain utilitarianism, centered on the speed and efficiency of the message reception. “The novel of elegant, highly distinct prose, of conceptual delicacy and syntactical complexity, will tend to divide itself up into shorter and shorter sections, offering more frequent pauses where we can take time out”.⁹

The alternative pattern offered by e-books is a model where the alterity seeks its identity. The e-literature brings an alternative to paper while it continues the idea of literature, but it does not fully deny nor replace it, Lucia Simona Dinescu states in her article *Modele literare alternative/ Alternative Literary Models of “România literară/Literary Romania”* in 2006, no. 42, ending conclusively: “The moderators and literary criticism of the sites will make a careful selection of texts to be posted. At that time, alternative literary texts will not be suspected and accused of lacking value or sent to the literature category of “involuntary expression.”¹⁰ – translation mine. If literature makes us better, the Internet should make us almost perfect... The virtual space is really wide and it has a specific hetero-cosmos in which avatars or masked identities become so mobile that the furthest becomes the nearest and the nearest becomes a stranger. This is also the contribution of the postmodern trends where the

⁸ <http://hyperliteratura.ro/e-book/>, accessed on October 8, 2014.

⁹ http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1.855.659/, accessed on October 3, 2014. See also *The texture of Internet: Netlinguistics in Progress*, p. 143, Santiago Posteguillo, María José Esteve and M. Lluís Gea-Valor, eds., Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007.

¹⁰ Lucia Simona Dinescu, *Modele literare alternative*, „România literară”, 2006, no. 42

carnavalesque, entertainment acquis, the drug-networks (Second Life, Facebook etc.) are to be found... We live in a paradoxical time in which fiction became almost a reality, and reality fades to the fictional world.

Such strange worlds, half-imaginary are possible because of virtual and augmentative technologies. In this way, people have opened a new Pandora's box, secret and strange, reaching a realm where reality and non-reality combines in a unique hybrid. It depends on the point where humanity will know to stop, to keep what was / is still beautiful and useful of the devoted literature, in a broad sense, and to extend the benefits of the internet...

Conclusion

When referring to the relationship between literature and the internet, we find that initially this was defective. Today there is a connection somehow mutually tolerant and likely collaborating in the future. It is somehow regrettable that the contemporary writers still fail to integrate the new communication technologies within their works, avoiding this reality in literature by writing novels on historical topics or whose action is set just a few decades ago, or by choosing some characters from the underdeveloped communities or at the edge of the society, but not reaching a topic strictly related to the Internet world; however, the "fourth wave" of the digital age is so strong (almost like a tsunami) that holds and will continue to have an impact which, in every sense, by necessity, literature will be subjected in a constructive way.

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Webography

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