General paper

BASIC CHARACTERISTICS OF INSTAGRAM POETRY

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Abstract. *This paper discusses changes in the literary and reading cultures with an emphasis on Instagram poetry. Digitization and extended distribution of literary works have redefined the understanding of reading literature in electronic culture. The rising of the chains of bookshops, the digitization of reading, TV book clubs, and reading on e-readers are some of the factors that have influenced the way literature is distributed and valued. All these phenomena have significantly changed the reading experience. In that environment, new genres have emerged that encompass a digital apparatus to both consume and produce the text or artwork culminating with Instagram poetry. This is a new subgenre which is created and published in the social media Instagram, and consists of verses and images or photos as a complement. Definin Instagram poetry, its main characteristics and its impact on redefining the approach to poetry are some of the basic aims of this paper.*

Key words: *Instagram, Instapoetry, Instapoets, poetry, literature*

1. INTRODUCTION

Digital technologies determined the progress of civilization, developed the communication channels and platforms so that human beings are interconnected more than ever before. The fast development of technologies and their rapid transformation have improved the art and culture in all aspects of human life, and as a result the culture of reading has changed. Young, creative authors who grew up in an environment determined by digital technologies have created new literary genres and forms. Social media distribution in recent years has led to intense cultural and linguistic transformations in a globalized society.

The creation and transformation of genres occurs thanks to multimodal language tools offered through virtual platforms, among which Instagram is the most outstanding. With these popular tools, a lot of young poets rose to prominence in the literary world (Oliveira & Fazano 2020).

Young Instagram poets may therefore be considered innovators of multimodal writing who employ ever-evolving technologies to engage in authentic literacy practices in digital spaces (Kovalik & Curwood 2019). Short and diverse lines by Instagram poets, which can be shared easily due to the specificity of social networks, are a reflection of a new generation which dictates a new concept of publishing and communication among readers. The representatives of this literature on the international scene gained popularity through sensitivity to what some authors define as collective consciousness (Oliveira & Fazano 2020). Some of the most famous Instagram poets are @rupikaur_ (4 million followers), @atticuspoetry (1.5 million followers), @christopherpoindexter (374k followers), @nikita_gill (579k followers), @r.m.drk (2.3 million followers), @r.h.sin (1.9 million follwers), @karliekloss (8.7 million followers) and @pierrejeanty (701k followers). These poets developed a new genre called Instagram poetry, or Instapoetry. It is a new subgenre of poetry created and published on the social media Instagram, and consists of verses, images and photos as a complement (Oliveira & Fazano 2020). This genre gained popularity among digital, online audience, but it also went beyond social media when Instagram poets started publishing their poetry collections which found their audience beyond the digital space.

The newly-created form of the literary text has not been immediately recognized, and a lot of authors criticized that type of creativity. The public has been asked whether Instagram poetry participates in what is as aesthetics of E-literature. That question is asked because poetry has been viewed over the centuries as a demanding activity, both for reading and creating, while social media, due to its nature, gives the impression of easiness in the process of creating verses (Berens 2019). In that sense, the answer was given by Leonardo Flores (2018) who suggests that contemporary digital landscape of sharing a context with massive audiences found in Instagram poetry has spawned a new category of electronic literature, what he refers to as third generation literature. That is the existing literature working with massive audiences (Flores according to Naji 2018).

This paper discusses changes in the literary and reading cultures with an emphasis on a form of digital poetry – Instagram poetry. We will try to identify the main impact that redesigned the literary field, among which the most prominent are digitization and new ways of reading and spreading books. Defining Instagram poetry, its main characteristics and its impact on redefining the approach to poetry are some of the basic aims of this paper.

2. READING CULTURE IN THE AGE OF INTERNET

The development of technology, the Internet, networking around the world and globalization are the basic characteristics of the modern age. The products of this development define the progress in all human activities. They get into all aspects of human life from performing daily activities and entering communication to improving various areas of human labor and creativity. Culture has also succumbed to these changes, because technological development has always shaped human cultural artefacts such as poetry, stories, music (Emerson 2014).

Contemporary electronic culture has significantly influenced the field of literature and led to changes in its reading and interpretation. Jim Collins explains this change in his book Bring on the Books for Everybody: How Literary Culture Became Popular Culture. The basic idea of the book that Rooney, 2012 explains precisely by suggesting less concise but more accurate subtitle that would read "How Literary Culture Has Been Affected by the Same Market

Forces that Every Other Aspect of Consumer Culture Has Been Affected by". In that sense, Collins explains new ecology of literary field by taking into account new ways of circulating and reading books (Wright 2011).

With digitization and facilitated distribution of literary works the understanding of reading literature in electronic culture has been redefined. The rise of bookshop chains, online bookshops, retail chains, digitization of reading, TV book clubs, such as Oprah's Book club, as well as recommendations for reading on e-reader and Amazon are relatively new institutions affecting the way books are distributed and valued. All these phenomena have significantly changed when and where reading experience takes place, (Rooney 2012) as some of the basic indicators of change of ´ecology` in the literary field such as book-to-film adaptations appear. These newly established institutions have led to significant changes in the "infrastructure" of modern book reading and require reconsideration of existing assumptions about the status of reading culture (Wright 2011).

The approach to reading is changing significantly due to the increased access to books. Thanks to the Internet and technology that has made digitization of different content possible, every human around the world can access almost all existing literary works. Unlike ´traditional` libraries, which are exclusively limited to the elite, access to e-books is democratic and can be called inclusive because each book is offered to every person (Collins 2010). Collins calls this practice of making books more easily accessible a delivery system. Delivery systems provide not just the books but also the sites, the talk, the sense of belonging to a community of readers. Through pervasive consumerism, an impulse towards self-improvement and a widespread desire to use literature as a lifestyle signifier, the formerly solitary activity has been reborn as a social expression of value and taste. (Ibid.).

The book publishing industry is affected by convergence of literary, visual and material cultures (McDonald 2011) and that is a very important fact. Literature reading is incorporated in visual and electronic media (Rooney 2012). Collins explains the relationship between literature, film, new media and buying books. Contemporary relationships between film producers and literary publishers are symbiotic, and as result of that cine-literary culture occurs. In such culture of adaptations of complex literary works such as No Country for Old Men and Atonement can appeal across traditionally antagonistic taste cultures allowing them to be, at the same time, art films, popular genre films, prize-winners and, importantly, literary texts.

As a part of the dominant contemporary public opinion, reading books and using electronic media are considered and presented as antagonistic experiences. However, Collins, while analyzing the relationship "between the type of beauty offered by reading literary fiction and other sorts of aesthetic beauty, specifically those offered by material culture" (Collins 2010, 226) points out that literary critics in this regard have theorized about literature in a similar way to sociologists theorizing about the satisfaction provided by material objects (Rooney 2012). The process of adapting a book into a film does not simplify the literary text, as thought, but these two media are partners that form a "literary" taste. In the modern age, literature is visualized. What was once seen as the opposite merges, and the myth that literary, virtual, and commercial literatures are separate is broken (Wright 2011).

3. INSTAGRAM POETRY

3.1. Definition and characteristics of Instagram poetry

Much of what we encounter in our daily lives has been digitized and we are in a post human era where all individuals are in continuity, connected and therefore defined by digital influences. In such environment new genres such as electronic literature and digital art have emerged. These genres encompass digital cultural artefacts that require a digital apparatus to both consume and produce text or artwork (Naji 2018). The merging of literary, visual and commercial culture has created space for the emergence of new forms and genres, among which Instagram poetry stands out for its growing popularity. Its popularity is most vividly illustrated by Berens (Berens 2019) in a line that starts his essay about this new form of e-literature with: "If ever there were e-literature that could fill a stadium, it's Instagram poetry" (Ibid.).

A lot of authors see Instagram poetry as a subgenre of poetry, and the term itself refers to poetry that is produced for distribution through the social media platform Instagram, as the name implies (Berens 2019; Naji 2018; Vuorinen 2020). The content of Instagram poetry is almost always simplistic, inspirational and emotional, and most usually incorporates creative typography with bite size verses (Naji 2018). Berens explains it as text more akin to a greeting card than traditional poetry due of its sentimentality and combination of text and image (Berens 2019). Instagram poets or Instapoets use text and images in order to be able to convey their mood, but also to strengthen the ideas they write about in their poetry. They use different colors, photos and images to achieve this (Hultberg 2019). They also choose between different filters to enrich or beautify photos before posting (Lup et al. 2015). The poetry by one of the most popular poets in this field, Rupi Kaur, is shown in figures 1 and 2.

The topics that Instagram poets write about coincides in a certain sense with the topics that classical poetry writers dealt with such as love, alienation, human relationships, betrayal and pain. This poetry also has a motive represented in a modern society, a motive of self-help and life motivation, so there are topics in Instagram poetry that encourage the creation of a better life and following dreams. That aspect can be called the aspect of self-help. Some poets go a step further and their lyric poetry touches on political topics and ideas of social movements such as feminism, the fight for women's rights, migrations (Hultberg 2019). Instagram poetry by the poet Atticus is presented in figures 3 and 4.

3.2. Printing Instagram poetry

Instagram poetry goes beyond social media, and it is available in a material form of a book. Printed books collect exactly the same content accessible for free in the Instagram app. (Berens 2019). Individual posts on Instagram, seen as individual poems, are printed in the same way as traditional poetry collections. Depending on whether Instagram poetry is consumed as printed or published on online platforms, the approach to the work also changes. When poetry is read from a book its content is available. However, when it is read through social media Instagram, the reader's attention is not focused exclusively on the content of a particular poem. What a reader also notices and is visible on the screen at the same time as poetry, is the description of the author below the photo, and comments by other readers, number of likes and comments and a publication date. Such a change in the environment of consuming Instapoetry, as well as additional information, can affect

the interpretation and understanding of verses. The influence of comments can change the reader's attitude and their understanding of the message that the author is sending. On the other hand, if the readers read the same verses on paper, they are directly focused on them and the activity of reading coincides with the traditional approach to reading literature which is mostly viewed as a solitary activity. Berens (Berens 2019) points out that, stripped of liveness printed Instapoetry ends up looking banal, which causes the absence of fans inside the app. A printed book of Instagram poetry is a souvenir devoid of playfulness in a dynamic space of events such as an Instagram platform. However this does not lead to a reduction or complete discontinuation of such book sales, and therefore the need of the audience for such content to pay and be engaged in its interpretation is emphasized. Also, there is a possibility that the audience of printed poetry does not completely match the audience active on social networks, and that Instapoets' books are bought and read by people who do not have accounts on Instagram, or do not use it for such purposes. Nevertheless, we can assume that the number of such readers is smaller. The fact is that the cyberspace and social media are overcome, when it comes to Instapoetry. The very act of printing these poems is a kind of recognition of the existence and success of this type of creativity. The impact of Instagram poetry on the field of literature is best seen through changes caused when it comes to the sale of poetry books. Increased interest in poetry and its acceptance can be noticed in social media first, and statistics also illustrate that because the poetry book sales have jumped significantly after decades. Poetry seems to revive from prolonged sluggishness and won back its fame like the period of Renaissance or romanticism in the past centuries (Adek & Satria 2019). The aforementioned growing popularity of poetry in social media causes recovery in the poetry book sales in the United States. According to the global market information company NPD Group, twelve of the top 20 bestselling poetry authors in 2017 were Instapoets who combine their original poetry with images, creating highly shareable posts on Instagram, Twitter, Tumbler and other social media platforms. Almost half (47 percent) of poetry books sold in the U.S. in 2017 were written by Instapoets. (NPDGroup.com). Book publishers have found a way to extract extraordinary financial value from printed Instapoetry (Berens 2019).

Social media allows poets to share their work with a larger, younger and more diverse audience. Instapoet Rupi Kaur's first collection, 'Milk and Honey' sold more than one million copies in 2017, making it the bestselling poetry title. Compared to Homer, the best-selling classical poet, Instapoet Kaur sold ten times more books than Homer in 2017. In addition, two of the top 20 poets in 2017, Gabbie Hanna and Atticus, had never been published before, but they already had strong following on Instagram, which gave them an impressive start as newly published authors (NPDGroup.com).

This indicates the revival of the poetic genre thanks to new platforms and a new audience. This new poetry is growing rapidly and reaching a wider audience (Adek & Satria 2019). These impacts lead to a redefinition of the notion of poetry. Due to the simplicity of Instagram, Instagram poetry differs from the conventional one because it is more available to readers (Vuorinen 2020). It is no longer synonymous with a sacred ritual, which is performed with a high degree of difficulty by certain people. In other words, it is believed that poetry is considered to have undergone a significant democratization process lately (Adek & Satria 2019), which is the expected sequel of the democratization of the access to libraries and books in general.

3.3. Instagram poets

Platforms used by Instagram poets are social media whose number of users is constantly growing every year. In 2020 according to the number of active users, the most popular social media are Facebook, YouTube and WhatsApp, then Facebook Messenger, Weixin/WeChat, Instagram, TikTok... (Statista 2020). It is interesting that the poets who use Instagram as a publishing platform are more popular than the poets who use other social media. This fact makes it illogical because the main feature of the Instagram application is visuality, while there are other social media such as Twitter, which is more focused on text itself. However, the assumption is that poets achieve the greatest success on this platform because it is the favorite of adolescents and young people who are the audience of Instagram poets.

The value of digital poetry lies in the mobility and accessibility of Instagram as a mobile application for creating and consuming digital poetry. A significant feature of Instagram poetry is the way Instagram poets build up a picture of themselves as artists, and they became influencers (Vuorinen 2020). In addition to posts defined as poetry, poets post their own photos on their accounts, share contents that do not relate to literary text directly. In this way, they achieve closer communication with the audience because their Instagram profile is a platform where they also show their personality and art. Connecting poetry and audience is also achieved through the use of relevant hashtags such as #poetryofinstagram, #digitalpoet, #poetrygram, #poetryisnotdead and #micropoetry (Naji 2018). For Instagram poets, community and interactivity are very important, especially in terms of feedback (Kovalik & Curwood 2019).

Instagram poets such as @atticuspoetry (1.5 million followers), @christopherpoindexter (374 000 followers) and @rupikaur_ (4 million followers) have in fact proven to be so popular that their work also appears as best-selling print books. (Naji 2018). In addition to the above, it is important to mention some of the prominent Instagram poets who are influential thanks to the audience that follows and reads them, and these are: @nikita_gill (579k followers), @r.m.drk (2.3 million followers), @r.h.sin (1.9 million followers), @karliekloss (8.7 million followers) and @pierrejeanty (701k followers).

One of the most famous Instagram poets is Rupi Kaur who has four million followers on her Instagram account, where she posts poetry and other content, mostly her photos. After her debut as a poet, Kaur published two poetry collections, Milk and Honey in 2014 and Sun and Her Flowers in 2017 (Vuorinen 2020). The Canadian poet Atticus also published books that reached their popularity, published a poetry collection Love Her Wild: Poetry in 2017, The Dark Between Stars: Poems in 2018 and The Truth About Magic: Poems in 2019. Christopher Poindexter published three books in 2015 Naked Human, in 2017 Lavender (Remastered) and in 2018 Old Soul Love. The fact is that these poets entered the traditional reading space from digital space, and this leads to a conclusion that this kind of poetry is recognized and respected by new massive audience.

4. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Social media have radically changed communication, its flow and form. Through social media we get information, education, fun and we also engage in art. Instagram poetry is an example of artistic creativity of social media users which involves using this application tools to produce and publish art. However, this poetry goes beyond the boundaries of social media. Going beyond the boundaries of digital space, where Instagram poetry originated, and its

material realization is an example of the convergence of literary, visual and material culture, but in the direction opposite to the dominant opinion. Although the direction of the development, conditioned by digitization and modern technologies, is usually determined by striving to the transition from material to virtual space, and it is assumed that gradual marginalization of literature in material form, and even more extreme, suggests its complete exclusion in favor of electronic literature. However, this trend shows the opposite. This, perhaps, unexpected turn can be seen as the confusion and insecurity of society when it comes to a complete change in the patterns of human lives which insists on digitization of all areas that can be digitized. Also, putting poetry on paper and its consuming in such way can be interpreted as the aspiration for readers to equalize their "new" poetry and make it significant enough so that it can be equal to classical poetry in terms of value.

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OSNOVNE KARAKTERISTIKE INSTAGRAM POEZIJE

U radu se razmatraju promene u književnoj i čitalačkoj kulturi sa fokusom na Instagram poeziju. Digitalizacijom i olakšanom distribucijom književnih dela redefinisano je shvatanje čitanja književnosti u elektronskoj kulturi. Uspon lanaca prodavnica knjiga, digitalizacija čitanja, televizijski književni klubovi i čitanje preko e-reader-a neki su od činioca koji su uticali na to kako se književnost distribuira i vrednuje. Sve te pojave su znatno promenile čitalačko iskustvo. U tom okruženju pojavili su se novi žanrovi koji zahtevaju digitalne uređaje kako bi se konzumiralo i proizvelo umetničko delo, među kojima se ističe Instagram poezija. To je novi podžanr poezije koji nastaje i objavljuje se na društvenoj mreži Instagram, a sastoji se od stihova i slika ili fotografija koje ga upotpunjuju. Definisanje Instagram poezije, njene glavne karakteristike i njeno delovanje na redefinisanje pristupa poeziji neke su od osnovnih ciljeva ovog rada.

Ključne reči: *Instagram, Instapoezija, Instagram pisci, poezija, književnost*