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TWEETS, TWITTERATURE AND TWITTERSPHERE IN THE CONTEXT OF A POP-ELITE CULTURE

Abstract: The paper deals with the cultural and aesthetic role of Twitter, perceived not only as a social and communication medium that is politically active and criticizing, but also as a generator of borderline literary-colloquial genres. In the focus of the interpretative interest is the *tweet* as a specific genre whose domecile area is the Twitter social network. The deffinition of the tweet comes from the traditional poetics and rhetorics of mini and very short genres (forms), but it is situated in the new context of media and in the context of the current popular culture that is bordering on elitistic discourses. The rhetorics of the tweet is that of a paradigmatic pop-elite media genre. The examples anaylized are mainly from the most current Macedonian Twitter production.

Key words: *Twitter, tweet, Twittterature, borderline genre, micro/mini/very short literary forms, popular culture, pop-elite discourse, aphorism, witticism, rhetorics*

1. TWITTER / TWITTERSPHERE / TWITTER-ZONE

Twitter is not just a social network and it is not just an electronic medium for communication, criticism, polemicizing and advertising. Twitter is more than a *social network*. The Twitter network, at least and particularly one part of it, can be viewed as a 'Twittersphere' or a *creativity zone* where new borderline genres, forms of digital/electronic micro genres, hybrid short forms and very short forms (in prose: short-short story, flash fiction, quick fiction) are being produced, distributed and popularized. Twitter is also "the most popular microblogging platform", available for diverse linguistic and other analysis of sentiments and opinions (Alexander Pak, Patrick Paroubek, 2018).

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2. CULTURE OF MINIMALISM

The Twitter creativity zone's function is to innovate the social media and microblogging discourse and to produce a specific *popular and mass media culture of minimalism*. "Popular culture can be defined as the ideas, values, norms, practices, goods, and artefacts shared by the majority of people in a society. In industrial societies popular culture is associated with the culture spread by mass media for commercial and entertainment purposes (VincenzoMele, 2017).

Twitter minimalism is a sort of global digital miniaturism. It is not only verbal, but rather multimedial. And, paradoxically, Twitter minimalism is growing up together within globalist strategy and neoliberal media policies. The culture of minimalism promoted by Twitter is part of a postmodern culture which no longer recognizes the distinction between high and popular culture. "There is no such thing as popular culture." (Holt N. Parker, 2011). Culture today, in the 21st century, is a liminal, hybrid, interferent, even brutal space of expression, communication, information, creation and re-action, that gives the illusion of freedom, despites the real restriction of freedom (Kulavkova 2016).

The cult principle of individuality has been marginalized again by the principle of correctness; in other terms — by the dominant and powerful politics and media (the secret face of power). Mass culture, followed by the networking culture of social media, gives certain freedom of individual expression, but its priority is the new collective matrix of identity (transgender, transnational, transcultural). The tension between individual and collective identity is still actual.

In that context, the Twitter culture of minimalism is just another scene/network available for controlled conflict between the collective and the individual principles. Twitter freedom is still freedom, just with controlled influence. Before being controlled, the freedom of tweeting keeps its minimum of creativity. In the jungle of hybridity of tweets on Twitter, there is a class of good, inventive tweets. This class of cultural minimalism gives us the right to speak about the rhetoric and the poetics of the tweet.

3. ACTUALITY OF TWITTERSPHERE

Every tweet is being created and exists in this very moment. The reception of the tweet production is in process, every moment, not only every day. Local or national profiles in the Twittersphere are a mirror of the actual state of mind, which is often full of conflicts and polemics. The Twittersphere

exteriorizes the internal political conflicts (wars). That is why the creative zone of Twitter reflects/articulates actual movements, tendencies and intentions of social revolt through individual profiles.

4. ANONYMOUS AND MULTIPLE IDENTITIES IN THE TWITTERSPHERE

But the individual profiles on Twitter are usually and mostly anonymous. Just because of this option of anonymous profiles and false/fake identities (even unreal followers named *bots* — when one person can have many profiles and nicknames, representing and promoting the same political matrix). As a result, the dominant public opinion, local and global, is created either by fake information and interpretation or fake profiles and identities. Conspiratorial theory is followed by conspiratorial reality and vice versa. Social media has become a theatre of political profiles, not of individuals.

Social media freedom, especially freedom of expression on Twitter (at least viewed from the Macedonian perspective in the last four years — 2015–2019) is a powerful mystification of reality. Like every mystification of reality, it has become a mystification of real facts. In the Twittersphere, the difference between fact and fiction tends to be lost or marginalized. So, the culture of freedom is sometimes an illusion of freedom — it creates a fake world within fake information.

In fact, today Twitter is a big challenge to the freedom of expression. Pseudonyms are not only a protection of freedom but also a misuse of freedom of expression, by individuals themselves and — indirectly — by (political) institutions behind them (hate speech).

5. MULTIFUNCTIONALITY OF THE TWITTERSPHERE

In other words, the social network can perform multiple functions, not just the social one. It remains the primary, albeit not the sole, function. There are other functions that draw attention: cultural, rhetorical and aesthetic, for instance. Twitter's multifunctionality allows many approaches, uses and, consequently, many different theoretical interpretations. Thereby, this essay is focusing particularly on the contact between the cultural, rhetorical and aesthetic function of the Twitter production, based on experiences from the Macedonian Twittersphere. I say 'contact' as Twitter as a social network promotes the "interconnection of functions", not just of users.

6. SHORT GENRES, A NEW PAREMIOLOGY

There is no doubt that the Twitter microblogging production is full of bubbles "Twitter is 40% 'Pointless Babble': Report.", 2010: https://www.cnbc.com/id/32446935). There is, in fact, an interference between the cultural, colloquial, rhetorical and aesthetic function of tweets, especially in those that continue, both in genre and in style, the practice of the so-called simple forms (legend, saga, myth, puzzle, saying, sophism, joke, fairytale), according the theory by Andre Jolles (1st ed. 1925).

During the XX century, this terminology, inspired by the rich and diverse practices, became bigger and more complex, reflecting the multiplicity of methods and theories of literature and culture. Thereby, the production of simple, small, short and shorter genres within the previous and the current century has created even a new contemporary paremiologic tradition, a minimalist culture and literature.[1]

Short genres, among which are proverbs, sayings, maxims, aphorisms, witticisms, jokes, riddles, have been once a part of oral popular culture; however, they also make up a special written and literary variant. As such, they have been studied in classical rhetoric and stylistics. Social and electronic media, especially Twitter, represent a new form of ludistic behavior (ludism), new "popular culture", which generates its own paremiology. The Twitter *trolling* approach stimulates lasciviousness of expression.

7. THE RHETORIC AND POETICS OF TWEET

The definition of the tweet stems from the traditional poetics and rhetoric of short genres (short forms), but this time within a new digital media and social space. It is the space of the new and contemporary *pop-elite culture*. It is borderline and hybrid, as it does not belong entirely to either pop-culture or to elite culture, but aims at both.

The tweet is a part of that new popular paremiology — the very term "tweet" is increasingly becoming a generic term that differentiates into several

[1] Kristina Dimovska (2017): "In literature, paremiologic forms are given under several different terminological solutions, such as "small and smaller forms" (Shkreb 1968), "proverbial wisdom or sentences of advice" (Sternbach 1974), "Einfache Formen/ Simple forms" (Jolles 1978), "oral folk forms" (Kitevski 1985) / "oral folk arts" (Kitevski 2011), "rhetorical forms" or "short prose or verse forms" (Chubelikj 1988), "small speech forms", "inherited simple forms", "short oral types" or "functional speech forms and styles" (Kjulavkova 1996), "expressive folklore" (Cavill 1996), "small folklore forms" (Sikimić 1996), "micro genres" or "literary minimalism" (Uzharevich 2012), "patterns/ models of wisdom" (Kishova 2014), "paroemiae" (Fattakhova & Kulkova 2014)."

sub-genres of tweet — from an ordinary social interaction/salute (good morning) and a basic news/information to retweet and more complex aphorisms, allusions, (humoristic, ironic and satiric) witticisms, jokes, set phrases, sayings, maxims, parables, morals, slogans, paroles, virtual graffiti and combined verbo-vocal-visual messages (connected with links).

The most common definition of 'tweet' is an internet "message sent via Twitter" (Kulavkova 2016). According to the initial definition of the founders (2006), the tweet is a "short, but unconscious information". Etymologically, the English word *tweet* means a bird call; that was the basis for the design of the logo of Twitter, the blue bird.

The tweet is a short post (up to 140/240 characters) — witty, critical, wise, ironical, allusive, rhythmical, easy to remember — published on the Twitter Timeline (TL). The tweet is an 'online' graffiti written on the 'wall' of its author and is available to all *followers*, as well as other users of the Twitter network.

8. THE NOTION OF TWITTERATURE

Although the primary function of tweeting was the interchange of brief information, part of the Twitter production had surpassed, through time, that (unambitious) goal and had started to conquer the space of the aesthetic.[2] That is why, when we talk about *twitterature*, we take into consideration not only its rhetorical, but also its aesthetical (poetical) aspects, either latent or manifest.

In order to talk about *twitterature,* by which we imply a certain aestheticism of tweets, they should carry an additional, secondary meaning. Twitterature has the characteristics of para-literature, or a marginal literary genre. The domicile virtual space of twitterature is the Twitter-zone.

Those tweets that are stripped of any additional meaning belong to the group of ordinary, colloquial information. The tweets in the Twitter-zone, based on the principle of linguistic and cultural minimalism, comprise a new, hybrid, multimedia, popular literature, termed with a special coinage/neologism — "Twitterature".[3]

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[2] An agency research from August 2009, mainly based on a corpus of tweets from the Anglophone countries, has put forth the following classification: Pointless-babble — 40%; — Conversational — 38%; — Pass-along value — 9%; — Self-promotion — 6%; — Spam — 4%; — News — 4%. https://timesofmalta.com/articles/view/40-per-cent-of-twitter-messages-pointless-babble-study.270173

[3] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Twitterature

Twittersphere has its own formal canons fit for the promotion of the tweet. It is a double promotion — there is interaction between the rhetorical and the aesthetic function of the tweet.

On the one hand, the tweet is popularized as a free virtual micro best-seller, as a mass-media statement, a mini-text and a "speech act" with a specific rhetorical and pragmatic interest. As such, it is a virtual performance that has the power to influence public opinion and to persuade the public (persuasive function), as well as to provoke a certain notional, political, social and even religious re-action.

On the other hand, the tweet aims at a certain elitism, even aestheticism, especially when it has reached a certain stylistic identity, semantic delicacy and form perfection, which suppresses its pragmatic function and puts to the fore its literary/aesthetic function.

9. POP-ELITE TWITTERATURE

That is how the rhetorical (pragmatic, referential and persuasive function) connects with the literary one (aesthetic, stylistic), and the popular with the elite genre. This results in the creation of a new category/class of tweets that perform a pop-elite cultural function (Kulavkova 2016). It means that, at the same time, one tweet can influences the public opinion, and keep its own reason of existence, its autonomy to be a public expression of personal statement, emotion, vision and evocation.

Based on this, we can talk about *pop-elite tweets,* or pop-elite usage of the Twitter-zone. The result of every interaction between the popular and the mass, the interactive and the aesthetic, the literary and the elite is a specific cultural and social effect, a special media Good, a cultural value. It is an invitation to revisit and shift conventional cultural systems.

The Twittersphere, perhaps because of its limited space (initially 140 characters, 240) has set its rules of the discursive game: brevity, speed, lucidity, witticism, humor, irony, sarcasm, wordplay (even vulgar speech), and to make a point.

This concerns especially those tweets that are not mere informative messages (announcements, news, social interactions). It concerns those messages that are tweets in a narrower, rhetorical and poetic sense of the word, and which make up the corpus of twitterature. Those tweets build the culture and poetics of the new short genres, digital and perennial: statements, aphorisms, proverbs, maxims, sayings, witticisms, wisdoms, word puns, two-line

poems, graffiti. They are a constituent part of the new popular culture and literature.[4]

10. CONCLUSION: FROM USE TO ABUSE OF TWEETS

Tweets deconstruct old myths and create new ones. Every world is founded on a myth, and the new one is no exception. A story, a mythical image. Occasionally a misconception. In one way or another, tweets influence the changing worldview, and with it — the changing world itself.

Modern creators of global and local development policies and strategies act as world-makers, albeit hybrid, false makers, quasi-messiahs. These world-makers are conscious of the meaning of the Twittersphere, because it reflects the vibrations of the different social strata, it registers the amplitudes of the sensibility of the masses and the influencers.

Because of the importance of public opinion, twitterature gains in significance and is treated as a special zone of interest. A mere fun and play zone can, in certain circumstances, become a zone of special social interest. The zone exerts its influence on public opinion, it manipulates public opinion, which results in change of the structures of power, of governing regimes, and eventually, in the realization of someone's Interest. All social networks, including Twitter, can be used and abused.

More and more, the tweets are abusing the global Twittersphere in order to promote fake news and interpretation of reality, especially political one. As a consequence, the public opinion created via social media such as Twitter is saturated with fake news and image of the world. Mass culture has become an institution, and as an institution it is the object of manipulation, surveillance, control and supervision.

The more humanity loses its humane side, the more violent it becomes. Any necessary means are employed, as the end justifies the means, now more than ever before in the past. And the end is global, absolute power.

[4] The differences between Twitter and Facebook, for example, are noticeable: while Facebook is narrative and promotive, Twitter is taxative and dialogical. Users of either one of these social networks do not connect globally, but within select social, political and intellectual circles (students, teenagers, civil society, pensioners). Both networks have constructed their own communicational clichés. Both make use of intermediality: verbal messages are complemented (illustrated) visually and musically and are open for numerous links (Youtube, TV, etc.) Both have critical points at which they become monotonous and banal (interaction protocols, especially in the morning, religious and state holidays, profane day-to-day activities, commemorations, daily politics).

ANNEX (SOME EXEMPLES OF TWEETS):

- Хартиган@Mad_Hartigan: T. W. I. T. T. E. R. The Way I Try To Escape Reality
- Хартиган@Mad_Hartigan: Some people reach the goal so late that there's already no one there waiting for them.
- Мр Моџо Килингтон@mojokilington: A sane person has a thousand wishes. A sick person has only one. To finish building Skopje 2014. (Best tweet of 2015)
- Мр Моџо Килингтон@mojokilington: If you find consolation in the fact that both the poor and the rich eventually die, then perhaps you deserve nothing better.
- Влатко Васиљ@VlatkoVasilj: Our people are so divided that, if one should play tennis against a wall, half of the people would cheer for the wall.
- Jasna Koteska@JasnaKoteska: "Reminder of a very old rule. The secret service helps in the installation of authoritarian regimes, but also in their breakup."
- Jasna Koteska@JasnaKoteska: Are you afraid of death? I, for instance, am terrified of immortality.
- Goran Teodosievski@zicerinho: If three idiots can be louder than Plato and me, I don't believe in democracy. Socrates
- Мише Паника@Mile_Panika: While we segregate into patriots and tratiors, somewhere a Chinese guy is telling Chuck Norris: "Sorry, I didn't recognize you. All you white people look the same to me!"
- Мрчатор@Strshlen: Our people have always treated the dead better than the living. That's why everything has gone to hell.
- Скорќе@KapnKrk: Stop the country, I want to get off!
- Mindplumber@mindplumber: There is a Pecko5 in each and every one of us, a reincarnation of Itar Pejo.
- Курвин Воденьак@Jovanowsky: How things have changed. Mother is idling away on Facebook, while you are frying eggs for breakfast.
- Bisera@zamislena: In our country a hunger strike is not an act of protest, but a way of life.
- E.@EStavrevska: Our national sport is coming to heel.
- Bobce@oltovski: The weather — just like any Macedonian. Always in minus.

[5] The cartoons featuring Petsko (lit. one who stings) were a long-running series of satirical cartoons by Darko Marković (1940–2016). (*translator's note*)

- i999y@i999y: People from Skopje! The boat can sail off easily! You all just need to flush your toilets at the same time!
- Грета@GretaOdTreta: When in a conversation, you should know when to change the topic and when to change the interlocutor.
- Волкот од шумата@wolf_forest_228: If Bulgaria had exited the EU, half of Macedonia would've suffered a heart attack.
- Тројанска@Trojanska_: How can you kill evil when it never turns its back to you?
- Тројанска@Trojanska_: Whatever you are running away from during the day will get to you at night.
- Angie@____Angie: technique: swimming between the lines.
- Оној со брадата@legovski: — What do you listen to? — Rock. You? — My wife.
- Сајлент@dr_arsen: Dad, when did you and mom get to know each other? — 5 years ago. — But you've been married for 25 years! — If you get to know your wife before marriage, son, there will be no marrige.
- EmptyPersona@darkhour_seeker: The blindest person is the one who refuses to listen.
- Four@GabriellaStan06: Where is that heart of his where he keeps me? I cannot get out, and I want to live.
- Една е Тетка!@TheTetka: I once died for us both.

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