The Platform is the Message? Transformations of Literary Writing and Reading on *Facebook* in Bulgaria

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Abstract: The paper explores the transformations of literary writing and reading in Bulgarian on *Facebook* as a commercial platform. First, it explores how *Facebook* as a platform with particular technical affordances influences the structure of the literary text, privileging short forms and the combination of written and visual content. Most literary pieces published on *Facebook* do not engage in intertextual references and do not require from their readers complex knowledge of narrative techniques. At the same time, readers approach each individual post with literary content as part of the author's *Facebook* page as an evolving and ongoing project. Second, the paper explores Bulgarian literary communities on *Facebook* and shows that they are strongly clustered, not only according to the difference between high literature and popular literature, but also according to differences between genres. Finally, the analysis reveals that while many online platforms blur the distinction between authors and readers, *Facebook* remains rather traditional in this respect and narrows down the types of interactions allowed to liking, commenting, and sharing. Readers on *Facebook* are followers, devoted fans, customers buying merchandize but only rarely co-authors. Nevertheless, the way the platform relies on algorithms to structure interactions and to privilege certain types of content and behaviour over others has remained unquestioned so far.

Keywords: *Facebook*, literature, implicit reader, literature communities, interactivity, platform politics

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In a television interview uploaded on the *Facebook* page "Letters of Flesh,"[1] the poet Iliyan Lyubomirov, better known as Avgustin Gospodinov, paraphrased the famous phrase by writer and poet Georgi Gospodinov, "Those who read are beautiful" as "Those who read are sexy."[2] Wearing a leather jacket and sitting on a motorbike in his profile photo, Avgustin Gospodinov communicates with his 24 000 fans directly on *Facebook*, where he publishes his own poems, photos, and information on his latest projects.

Avgustin Gospodinov has been one of the faces of a new wave of poets and writers who reach their audience thanks to the commercial platform *Facebook*. Some of these authors publish first on *Facebook* and opt for print editions of their work only later. Other less known authors never reach the stage of print publication. On the other hand, well-established and internationally known Bulgarian authors such as Georgi Gospodinov, Iliya Troyanov, Alek Popov, Milen Ruskov, and others also use *Facebook* in order to share excerpts from their texts and information about upcoming readings or simply to keep in touch with their readers. Finally, famous online comics such as "Тони Патето" [*Toni, the Duck*][3] or "Просто Спас" [*Just Spas*][4] use their *Facebook* pages to not only share their art but also to create communities, offer critical commentary to urban politics or, increasingly, to offer merchandise – images based on their comics.

This article explores diverse pages for sharing literary pieces on *Facebook*, both in prose and verse, and poses several key questions:

- In what ways do the technical affordances of *Facebook* influence the structure of the literary text?
- In what ways has reading on *Facebook* been entangled with advertising mechanisms and strategies?
- To what extent does writing and reading on *Facebook* erase (or emphasize) the borders between high and popular literature online?
- To what extent does *Facebook* encourage interactivity? How do authors and readers interpret interactivity on *Facebook*?

In order to answer these questions, this article proceeds by exploring in the first place the ways in which *Facebook*, as a commercial platform with particular technical affordances, creates opportunities for writers to communicate with their readers, while at the same time

[1] Lyubomirov, Iliyan. "Letters of Flesh." Facebook. Accessed February 14, 2020.
[2] Lyubomirov, Iliyan. "Nova.bg." "Letters of Flesh." Facebook. Accessed February 14, 2020.
[3] Toni, the Duck. *Facebook*. Accessed 17 February, 2020.
[4] Just Spas. *Facebook*. Accessed 17 February, 2020.

constraining them in a variety of ways. For this purpose, content analysis is applied to the first 15 posts on the *Facebook* pages of 45 Bulgarian authors online. The second part of the study offers a proto-cartography of Bulgarian online communities, based on social network analysis performed with the Netvizz application. In the third and final part of the study, the focus is on reading practices on *Facebook* and more specifically, on the role of the reader as fan, commentator, co-author, and client in relation to the analysed posts by the same 45 Bulgarian authors. The final part of the text outlines the main challenges and limitations of the current research as well as important directions for future research.

How *Facebook*'s Affordances Influence the Structure of Texts

The particular affordances of *Facebook* as a platform define key parameters of the texts that are shared there. There is an observable preference for short forms: stories in five sentences, poems in a few lines, excerpts from books. The texts are catchy, provocative, designed to capture attention. The full name or the initials of the author often appear below the poem. Attribution is an important aspect of sharing online.

It is common practice for authors to separate their personal profile from their page as authors. For example, up to 2018, the copywriter, poet, and writer Konstantin Trendafilov maintained his *Facebook* page "Мърлявият блог на един спретнат човек" [The untidy blog of a tidy man], with more than 35 000 followers. The poems and excerpts from his texts in prose were usually followed by his name hyperlinking to his personal profile:

> August 3 2017
>
> I remember exactly when this happened –
>
> It was somewhere in between the red and the green
>
> At a traffic light on my way to the store
>
> That I stopped loving you.
>
> Just like that, by the way,
>
> Like that, without sad music
>
> Like that certainly,
>
> As when a man realises he is not actually hungry.
>
> And I had just ordered.[5]
>
> Konstantin Trendafilov[6]

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[5] All translations in the text are mine.

This separation between the personal and the professional is always provisional: it is porous and ambivalent. Part of the popularity of the texts is undoubtedly due to the personality and the popularity of the author. The poem quoted above has over 1 000 likes and eleven comments, eight of which belong to women. A similar gender distribution among fans can be observed on the *Facebook* page of Avgustin Gospodinov. The following poem published on March 8, the official Woman's Day in Bulgaria, has over 1 100 likes and eight comments only by women:

> *8 March 2017*
> Eighth of March
> You wanted us to be equal.
> I told you
> You aim
> Too low.
>
> Iliyan Lyubomirov[7]

The distinction between prose and poetry on *Facebook* become less strict as can be clearly seen from the project "Пет изречения" [5 sentences] by Ivan Totev and Dimitar Stefanov, who offer to their readers short stories in only five sentences. The platform stimulates experimenting with shorter forms and the rendition of text as image:

> 4 February
> This is how our book starts. You can find it in big bookstores or order it online on https://bit.ly/2RxfmdZ
>
> Ivan Totev / Dimitar S. Stefanov[8]

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[6] Trendafilov. Konstantin "The Untidy Blog of a Tidy Man." „Помня кога се случи"[I remember when it happened]. Facebook. Accessed 17 February, 2020. https://www.facebook.com/theuntidyblog/.
[7] Lyubomirov, Iliyan. „Осми март" [8th of March]. "Letters of Flesh." *Facebook*. Accessed 14 February, 2020.
[8] Totev, Ivan and Dimitar Stefanov. "Five sentences." 2019. „Бъдеще свършено"[Future Perfect]. *Facebook*. Accessed 17 February, 2020.
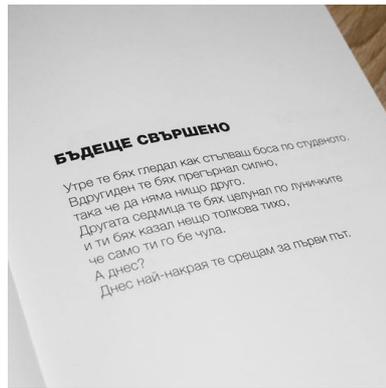
Facebook encourages sharing texts in the form of images – a photo has the advantage of sparing the reader the need to scroll down or press the "show more" button. It is simple and efficient. In the case above, the photo also happens to be from a book the authors are advertising.

Sometimes the main purpose of publishing on *Facebook* is to experiment with new texts and test the grounds. But often it is also to publicise texts that have already been published and to attract attention to the printed copy. Sharing literary pieces in such cases is a form of indirect advertising, a teaser that promises without giving the full text. Sometimes authors are also more direct about advertising. Thus, the poetess and writer Rene Karabash shares the following post:

23 April at 21:25

I have several copies of "Flanks" at home.

I send them signed with delivery services.

Whoever wants a copy can write to me.

That's it.[9]

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[9] Karabash, Rene. *Facebook*. Accessed 17 February, 2020.

The combination of writing short forms and self-promotion online is characteristic of authors across the spectrum, from high literature to popular literature, from unpublished authors to well-established international authors. In addition, information about festival success, book translations, and honorary awards abroad is often found on the pages of the most successful Bulgarian authors such as Georgi Gospodinov or Alek Popov. *Facebook*, however, is not only a place for demonstrating success. Creating a page requires neither finances nor a high level of technical skills, so the platform allows many new and unknown authors to share their texts with others on dedicated pages. Indeed, one can find numerous young authors on *Facebook* who share poems, short stories, aphorisms, and motivational phrases about life. Many of those pages have adopted as a genre for their posts a combination of text and "artistic" photos, often black-and-white, of women and men in seductive postures. For example on the page of "Следполунощни бележки" [After midnight notes], a page with 7 000 fans, we can find the following post:

> 22 March
>
> Sometimes I wonder what is left of a person after a sweeping, mad, all-consuming love? And can you be the same? Or rather you become a part of something that you once were? You become like the torched and destroyed by fire Sodom and Gomorrah, whose remnants do not even vaguely remind us of what had once been? You need to recover yourself, build yourself up from scratch or resign to the pieces of yourself. To drown them, scattered as they are, in a glass of wine at three o'clock in the morning while asking yourself what could be different, what could you do in order to be happy again…
>
> Some loves can destroy you. If you give them the power to destroy you.[10]

The importance of photos has to do also with the incentives of *Facebook*, whose platform algorithms privilege posts with visual content or videos. But the artsy photos also function as an indicator that what we are dealing with is identified by its author as art or, more specifically, literature. Their stylistics, colour-scheme, and often symbolic character differ from the usual *Facebook* photos and point to the fact that the reader is dealing with a

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[10] After midnight notes. Facebook. Accessed 17 February, 2020.

literary piece. Visual content is crucial in indicating the genre, since *Facebook* as a platform does not distinguish between sharing art and sharing personal stories; *Facebook* posts have a general structure that stays the same regardless of the content they are filled with. Thus, authors have to be creative in order to demarcate a particular post as "literature." Artsy images perform precisely this function of genre-signification.

Considering the importance of the visual element on *Facebook*, it is not a surprise that one of the most successful genres on the platform have been online comics. The comic series about *Toni the Duck* and *Just Spas* have thousands of fans and combine socially engaged criticism with successful merchandising strategies. *Toni the Duck* is an ironic reference to womanizers who approach women on the beach. The comic also introduces a number of other hustlers in plots referring to the latest Bulgarian and world news, as well as to Sofia's urban politics.

The following two images,[11] for example, are clear cases of poking fun at the recent reconstructions on Graf Ignatiev Street in the centre of Sofia. The first comic strip tells the story of people dying after falling on the potentially dangerous street elements installed by the Municipality of Sofia. The reason why the characters have not seen the potential danger is the fog combined with air pollution, another highly controversial problem in Sofia politics.

The second comic strip refers to the black monument installed by the Municipality again on Graf Ignatiev Street. The strange shape of the monument and the lack of any correspondence between it and the surrounding architecture provoked an ironic strip portraying the monument as an alien object encountered by the hustlers, dressed as cosmonauts. The comic strip has proved to be a perfect genre for *Facebook*, allowing for the seamless combination of text and image in an easily sharable format.

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[11] Toni, the Duck. 2019. Facebook. Photo 1, Photo 2.
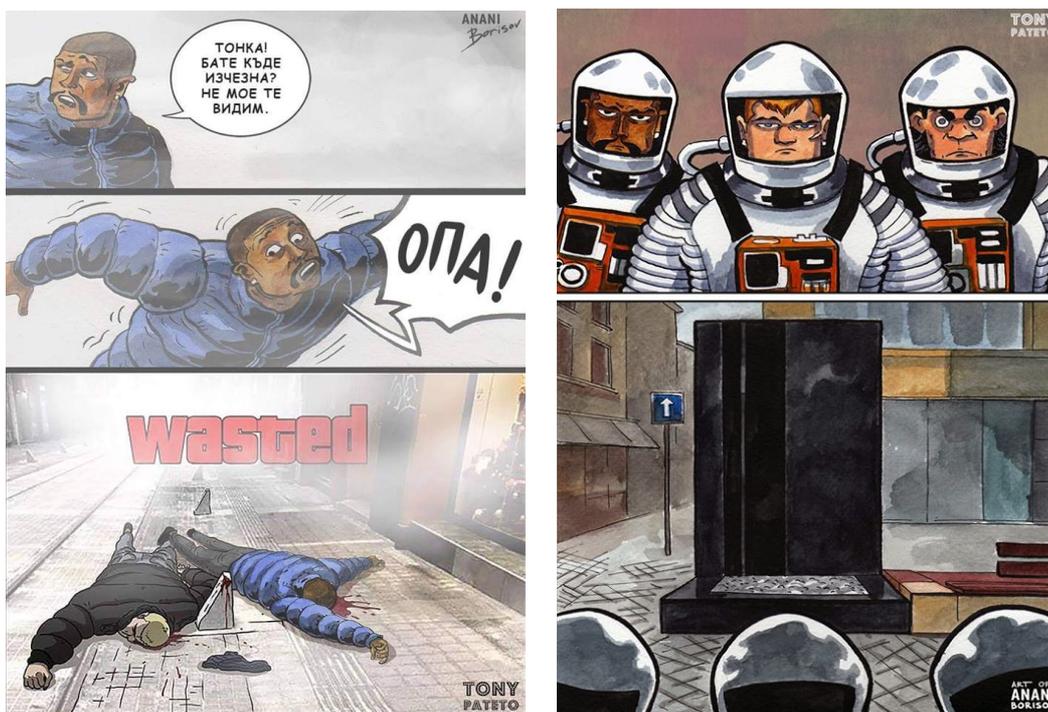
This is a time-efficient comic strip that can be appreciated within a minute or two, often less, while scrolling on one's phone or multitasking. Overall, *Facebook* as a platform encourages sharing short texts and an increased use of images. Unlike immersive novels, literature on *Facebook* is to be appreciated on the go, in a fleeting moment, in a fraction of a second. For this reason *Facebook* posts are often provocative, catchy, and verging on the aphoristic. Authors become brands that are to be recognized when we see their posts. Thus, despite the fleeting nature of posts themselves, the authors maintain stylistic consistency.

The crucial question for the purposes of this study is who is the implicit reader of these texts? Most pages by young authors rarely use intertextual references. They do not require a wide knowledge of classic or contemporary literature, nor of complicated narrative techniques and stylistic conventions. Instead, they offer easily recognizable visual cues that first, mark the text as a literary one, and second, point to how the text should be interpreted. More often than not, the images provided offer a symbolic interpretation of the text. Very rarely are the images in discord with the text or are they used to open spaces for alternative interpretations. Even among more established authors, the use of visual images serves as a key to the intended meaning of the text, even though they do engage more in intertextual references.

Surprisingly, the most demanding genre on the *Facebook* pages by Bulgarian authors are the online comics that refer not only to contemporary events and political debates but also to memes and to television programmes from Bulgaria and abroad, including TV series,

boxing, wrestling, and animation. What is more, online comics encourage the active participation of readers in interpreting them and require wide knowledge of contemporary popular culture.

Beyond genre particularities and the level of professionalization, the analysis of posts has established that the implicit reader on *Facebook* is a reader not only of one particular text, defined narrowly as a *Facebook* post, but of the complete "brand" of the author that is consistently maintained over time. Furthermore, *Facebook* allows authors to identify their actual followers and fine-tune the image they create of themselves depending on the audience and its reaction. In this sense, the implicit readers on *Facebook* are always on the verge of making themselves explicit through comments and reactions (such as likes, hearts, etc.), providing feedback much quicker compared to classic forms of publishing.

What is particularly interesting is that in all genres of literature analysed there was no attempt to address in a reflexive or even critical way the affordances of the platform. *Facebook* is perceived above all as a practically transparent, non-problematic infrastructure. The politics of platforms[12] and the ways in which *Facebook* in particular extracts the data of its users and decides algorithmically which content reaches readers remain completely unquestioned. Among the authors researched there was not even one who drew attention to the problematic aspects of *Facebook*. On the contrary, the platform is accepted as a given and the way it is being used remains surprisingly similar across genres and levels of professionalism. But does this mean that *Facebook* blurs the boundaries between so-called high and popular literature? Are different authors' pages really so similar? Could we really claim that the platform translates the hierarchical order of literature on the horizontal plane of the platform, where everyone is only one click away?[13] This question is addressed in the next section.

A Proto-map of Bulgarian Literary Communities

The connections between Bulgarian authors online are examined here in order to check whether they are randomly connected or form clearly defined communities. In order to do this, an analysis of social networks was performed based on the data collected with the

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[12] Gilespie, Tarleton, "The politics of 'platforms." *New Media & Society* 12, no.3 (2010), 347–364.
[13] Rone, Julia, "The Age of the Mediums." *Seminar-BG* 1(2011).

Netvizz application.[14] This type of analysis has four main characteristics: first, it focuses on the relations between different actors, since

> *[A]ctors and their relations are seen as interdependent rather than independent units; second, the relations between them are the most meaningful focus of analysis; third, the structural and/or relational features of these actors constitute the analytically relevant characteristics of them; fourth, relational ties between these actors are the channels for the flow of both material and non-material resources. Finally, the complete web of actors, their positions and their linkages – network structure – provides opportunities for (and constraints upon) action.[15]*

Following this approach, individual *Facebook* pages are not used here as the basis for analysis but rather the relations between them and the separate communities they form.

The analysis was made possible by using Netvizz, and in particular, the function "page like," which makes it possible to download the relational information about each *Facebook* page, i.e. how many and which other *Facebook* pages it has liked. Netvizz was a free application developed for academic purposes that was made unavailable in the end of 2019 due to *Facebook's* stricter privacy measures after the Cambridge Analytica data scandal. For this reason, the analysis conducted here will be much more difficult to perform in the future, as access to *Facebook* through Netvizz is no longer possible. The very fact that as researchers we are dependent on data owned by a private platform reveals clearly the power imbalances in platform politics and knowledge creation already outlined in 2007 by the sociologists Mike Savage and Roger Burrows in their seminal paper "The Coming Crisis of Empirical Sociology."[16]

What is more, not all Bulgarian authors have a *Facebook* page. Thus, the map that is presented here is by no means definitive and is destined to remain a proto-map of Bulgarian literary circles, a map that reflects only part of the much more complex Bulgarian literature scene. As Tomaso Venturini notes in relation to the limitations of research based on information online: "1. search engines are not the web; 2. the web is not the Internet; 3. the Internet is not the digital; 4. the digital is not the world."[17]

The map presented here is based on information from almost 40 *Facebook* pages and their webs of likes. The pages whose networks of likes have been analysed were chosen as

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[14] Netvizz Application. https://tools.digitalmethods.net/netvizz/facebook/netvizz/
[15] Caiani, Manuela, "Social Network Analysis." *Methodological Practices in Social Movement Research*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 368-397.
[16] Savage, Mike and Roger Burrows, "The Coming Crisis of Empirical Sociology." *Sociology* 4, no 5 (2007): 885–899.
[17] Venturini, Tomaso, "Building on faults: How to represent controversies with digital methods." *Public Understanding of Science* 21, no 7 (2012): 804.

initial entry points, include those of: Avgustin Gospodinov – a young and popular Bulgarian author; Zahari Karabashliev, and Konstantin Pavlov – established Bulgarian authors; *Just Spas* – comics; Manga Academy – a school for Manga; The Diaries – a page for Vampire novels; AzCheta [I read] – a page for literary reviews and criticism. The initial "seed" pages were chosen on the basis of their popularity, but also with the aim to reflect the genre diversity of Bulgarian literature on *Facebook*. The information on likes, collected with the help of Netvizz (the depth of search was 1, i.e. a page and the pages liked by it), was afterwards visualised and analysed with the help of the network analysis programme Gephi, using the algorithm Force Atlas 2.

The network of mutual likes reveals the fact that there are clearly defined communities among Bulgarian *Facebook* users. On the map, the size of the different nodes corresponds to their betweenness centrality, which quantifies the number of times a node acts as a bridge along the shortest path between two other nodes. The colour of the nodes corresponds to the actors belonging to a particular community. The first thing to note about the network is the low level of overall coherence and connectedness. There are twelve separate clusters of pages as well as many pages that have not "liked" and have not been "liked" by any other page. These peripheral marginal actors on the map are above all young authors who do have some fans (often more than 1 000) but do not try to connect and form groups. They seem to be oblivious of the work of other authors or at least do not indicate publicly their interest in the form of "likes." On the other hand, in the very centre of the map we see Rene Karabash, who has established a strong link with "Letters of Flesh" of Avgustin Gospodinov and the "Untidy Blog of a Tidy Man" of Konstantin Trendafilov. In a sense, this indicates the presence of a group of young authors, which can be confirmed by additional information on literary events they organised together.

The group of pages in the upper left part of the map coloured in dark purple deals with vampires and fantasy stories more generally. The cluster of pages around *Just Spas* and *Toni the Duck* is to found in the upper right part of the map, coloured in light green. Parallel to this in bright green the cluster of pages around "Нека ти разкажа" [Let me tell you] focuses on quotes from books, recipes for positive thinking, and jewellery.
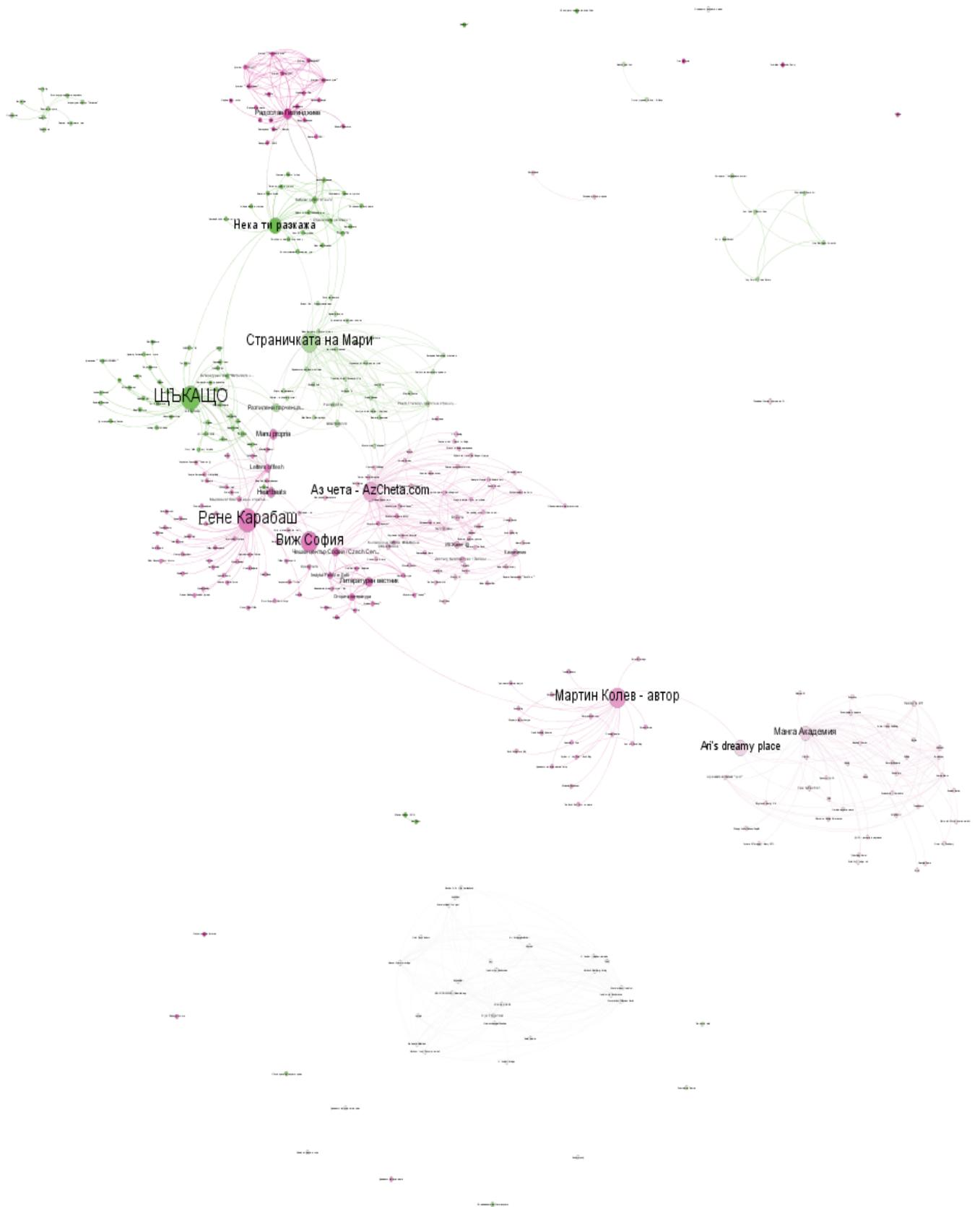
Fig. 1. A map of Bulgarian literary communities on *Facebook* produced with Gephi.

Tracing the relations all the way down, there are two more clusters in green. These two clusters are characterised by diverse groups of likes, including publishing houses, for example, the popular publishing house Colibri; foundations such as "Подари усмивка" [Give a Smile]; classic authors such as Blaga Dimitrova and Petya Doubarova; and pages dedicated to photography, for example, "Етюдите на София" [Sketches of Sofia].

Another similar hub of literary life is the *Facebook* page of the website "Аз чета" [I read], whose likes are directed towards bookstores, authors, and publishing houses. *I read* forms a big cluster of pages in bright purple in the centre of the map. In the very centre between *I read* and the cluster of young authors around Rene Karabash one can find the page "Виж София" [See Sofia], closely connected to the Czech Cultural Centre, the Polish Institute, Goethe Institute and "Литературен Вестник" [*Literary Newspaper*]. This cluster in light purple represents the centre of literary life on *Facebook* in Bulgaria. Finally, in the lower right part of the network there is the cluster around Martin Kolev, an author of sci-fi novels. This cluster is connected to another big cluster around Manga Academy, an Institute dedicated to teaching Manga. In the lowest central part of the map, there is a cluster of German pages around the author Iliya Troyanov.

What do these results reveal about the virtual presence of Bulgarian literature on *Facebook*? First, it is clear that different communities are separated from each other by genre. Newer genres such as comics, sci-fi, and manga are sharply delineated from the others and can be found on the periphery of the map. The pages with motivational messages and with self-help literature are closely connected and clustered together.

While in principle all authors use the same platform and there is no official separation by genres, clearly there is still a separation that takes place in an organic way. In the absence of outside critical sanction, authors themselves form communities of interest and stick to each other depending on genre similarities. But even though different pages belong to different clusters, they still belong to the same universe. Several pages, such as the one of Rene Karabash or *I Read*, act as mediators between high culture and popular culture, between strictly literary pages and city guides, pages dedicated to photography and alternative art, which guarantee that no matter how different pages are, they still form part of the same network.

In the absence of information about the "page likes" of the pages of Georgi Gospodinov, Alek Popov, and other top writers, the snapshot of the Bulgarian literary networks on *Facebook* reveals a rather parochial attitude. With the exception of the cluster around Iliya Troyanov, it seems that Bulgarian *Facebook* pages are directed above all to

Bulgarian audiences. There are only a few cases in which pages of Bulgarian authors have liked those of foreign authors or have been liked by them in return. There is a general process of self-enclosure in Bulgarian culture and language.

It is, however, also possible that precisely the missing pages of established authors provide the link between Bulgarian and foreign literary communities. It is for this reason that the map presented is to be considered a proto-map. The next stage of research would include looking for ways to compensate for the lack of Netvizz data in order to provide a fuller picture. Surveys and interviews could be further used to triangulate the existing observations and complement them with important information on the nature of online literary communities.

The Reader on *Facebook* as a Follower, Devoted Fan, Co-author, and Customer

In the third and final part of this pilot study, the transformation of reading on *Facebook* is explored based on the analysis of readers' comments on the online platform. Of special interest here is to what extent *Facebook* blurs the boundaries between authors and readers, and encourages a more interactive approach towards reading. Has indeed the Internet brought about a new age of the "prosumers"?[18] What possible dimensions of interactivity can be noticed on *Facebook*?

Contrary to expectations for the radical democratization of literature and the blurring of the distinction between author and reader online[19] – a phenomenon that can be clearly discerned in fan fiction, for example[20] – on *Facebook* old distinctions between authors and readers matter. Authors publish and readers like, share, and comment but only rarely become co-authors. Yet, on the pages analysed there were also important attempts at interactivity. For example, the young poetess Valentina Yorgova, whose *Facebook* page "Глад за думи" [Hunger for Words] has more than 16 000 likes, shared in February 2019: "I need your help so that we can do it together."[21] What had to be done "together" was to choose a name for the new book of the poetess and select the poems she would include in the book. Among the titles proposed for publication, one can find the following: *The Song of the Heart*, *The Melody of the Tender Strings*, *A Soul Universe*, etc.

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[18] Ritzer, George and Nathan Jurgenson,"Production, Consumption, Prosumption: The nature of capitalism in the age of the digital 'prosumer'." *Journal of Consumer Culture* 10, no. 1 (2010). 13-36.
[19] Rosen, Jay. 2006. "The People Formerly Known as the Audience." Accessed 17 February 2020.
[20] Lilova, Desislava, "Literatures online: the subversive practices of fan-fiction," Seminar-BG 6 (2011).
[21] Hunger for Words. *Facebook*.

If in this case participation is conceived of as the act of taking part in some aspects of creating a page or a literary text, in the case of the famous comics *Toni the Duck*, those who comment create their own subculture, marked by insider jokes and references. The readers of comics such as *Toni the Duck* actively participate in the discussion of each post. Intertextual references to memes, comics, and TV series are the norm in these comments. Thus, the already mentioned comic mocking the black monument installed by the Municipality of Sofia on Graf Ignatiev Street provoked numerous comments referring to *The Planet of the Apes*, the Playstation 4, *Apollo 13*, and others. Commenting becomes a game in which *Facebook* users compete in terms of quick wit, sense of humour, and creativity. In order to understand most comments, one needs not only to follow the latest news, but also to be acquainted with a broad range of titles from popular culture. References to previous comic strips from the same comics create a sense of community among the ones who get it. This kind of knowledge requires time and some dedication in following the posts on the page. The ideal reader is someone who follows each post on the *Facebook* page and is in fact a "reader" of the page as an open project, always in a state of flux.

At the same, the reader on *Facebook* is often perceived also as a client, either a current one or a potential one. For instance, Anani Borisov, one of the creators of *Toni the Duck*, alternates posts with comics with posts featuring posters for sale and posts of sketches he draws for money. Some popular pages for chick lit and self-improvement display a similar type of direct interaction with the readers as customers. The *Facebook* page "Пералня за души" [Washing machine for souls], with more than 37 000 likes, is being used predominantly to promote chick-lit books. What is more, one could order a book together with a cup as a special offer.

In this case, *Facebook* becomes a place to promote products. The commercial character of the platform, which sells the data of its users to advertising agencies, is matched by the commercial approach of the users themselves. There is no structural difference between a *Facebook* page for an author and the *Facebook* page for a shop or a business. In this sense, the authors who use their pages to do business and reach their customers directly use the platform exactly as it should be used. Commercializing literature is not a contradiction but a logical step in the use of *Facebook*.

To sum up, the reader on *Facebook* is sometimes a follower, and sometimes, as in the case of online comics, a devoted fan who understands all the complex references to past editions of the same comics and to popular culture more generally. Sometimes the reader is a

co-author, and sometimes just a customer of both literary texts and merchandise, including cups and posters. In most cases, all these functions overlap.

One thing is certain: *Facebook* has not contributed to blurring the boundaries between authors and readers. While platforms for collaborative writing, for example, do this, *Facebook* has a much more conventional and, to a considerable extent, rigid structure. Interactivity on *Facebook* is limited to commenting, liking, sharing, and other types of actions programmed on the platform. There is not much space for true creativity and experimentation.

Even though pages could be administered by several users at the same time, when it comes to literature, this seems to happen rarely. Readers are also rarely allowed to post themselves. Empowering readers and opening more opportunities for participation depends to a large extent on whether more writers would pay attention to *Facebook* as a non-transparent platform that imposes its own rules of the game.

Limitations of the Current Study and Directions for Future Research

One of the main limitations of the current study on the transformations of writing and reading online is its exclusive focus on only one social platform: *Facebook*. Future research can trace the role of Twitter and Instagram for sharing literature and compare the ways in which the affordances of different platforms influence the structure of the literary text and the patterns of interaction between readers and writers (or abolish this distinction altogether).

Another limitation of this study is the focus on *Facebook* "page likes" with data collected using Netvizz. As already suggested, future research could triangulate and expand this data with the help of surveys and interviews with key figures of contemporary Bulgarian literature. Such an approach would allow us to probe the authors' own views on the different communities they participate in and would provide a better understanding of some of the clusters observed on the proto-map of Bulgarian literary communities.

Last but not least, the analysis has singled out online comics as a particularly interesting and rich genre, with multiple references to other texts and a large community of fans actively participating by commenting and creating a world around the comics. In this sense, a focused study of the implicit reader of online comics could provide interesting insights into the on-going transformations of reading online.

This study aimed at providing a general macro perspective on Bulgarian literary writing and reading on *Facebook*. The analysis has shown that the use of *Facebook* by

authors has often been accompanied by transformations in the structure of the literary text, privileging short forms and visual content. What is more, both writing and reading on *Facebook* are strongly intertwined with diverse advertising mechanisms and strategies, both regarding the actors involved and the platform that collects the data of their interactions and sells it to advertisers. Moreover, even if there is no ultimate arbiter of truth or quality on *Facebook*, or any form of genre police, there is a strong clustering online based on different genres and sometimes on the quality of the writing itself. With few important exceptions, young authors remain marginalized and do not reach out to other young authors. Authors from newer genres such as fantasy, sci-fi, or manga tend to be very strongly connected within the same genre but very poorly connected to authors from different genres. A small number of mediators connect the different clusters and provide bridges between otherwise dispersed communities. Finally, *Facebook* does not encourage participation and interactivity beyond the limited number of functions it provides. But neither have the authors analysed problematized the platform in any way. It is this seamlessness of the platform, the almost natural way in which it functions, that makes it so powerful in determining both the structure of texts and the dynamics of interactions.

Marshall McLuhan once famously claimed that the "medium is the message." While such a position is undoubtedly reductionist, ignoring how *Facebook* structures online literature and literary communication is no longer viable. Apart from the acknowledgement of currently existing platform constraints and affordances, the exact mechanisms through which they are imposed should also be included in future research. Only if we understand how the platform structures our creativity and social interactions can we start thinking of alternatives and better ways to connect, create, and communicate. *Facebook* should be problematized. Share if you "like" this…

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