

## PLATFORMISING STORYTELLING: SHORT FICTION, NEOLIBERAL IMMEDIACY, AND TWITCH STREAMING IN ROMANIA

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**ABSTRACT.** *Platformising Storytelling: Short Fiction, Neoliberal Immediacy, and Twitch Streaming in Romania.* In light of the neoliberal ascent of platform capitalism, storytelling is undergoing an unmatched metamorphosis noticeable even in semi-peripheral cultures, including Romania's. From a methodological standpoint, we examine these literary and cultural transformations by situating a particular case study within the ideological frameworks of neoliberal capitalism as it manifests on streaming platforms. Our case study focuses on reallyrux's Twitch and YouTube series "Cine-i janghina?" ("Who's the Asshole?"), where audiences submit allegedly autobiographical short stories based on preestablished themes, focused on multi-sided conflicts. The host reads and discusses the stories in live streams, playfully evaluating their style while suggesting that the

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show enhances her audience's literary knowledge, thus positioning the series as both participatory entertainment and an informal workshop. Consequently, the study's aim is three-fold: first, to analyse the interrelationship between the literary and the digital, in particular, platform-based content; second, to investigate the revitalisation of the short story genre through participatory digital practices in the context of the prevalent trend of creative writing workshops in Romania; and third, to assess the immediacy-driven nature of post-millennial storytelling and its broader ideological implications. By exploring the intersection of platform media, participatory culture, and literary production, this paper sheds light on the evolving boundaries of storytelling in the age of platform capitalism.

**Keywords:** *short story, autobiography, social media, Twitch, Youtube, platform capitalism, neoliberalism, semi-periphery, East-Central Europe.*

**REZUMAT. Platformizarea povestirii: proză scurtă, imediatețe neoliberală și streaming de Twitch în România.** În lumina ascensiunii neoliberale a capitalismului de platformă, narațiunea trece printr-o metamorfoză de neegalat, vizibilă chiar și în culturile semi-periferice, precum cea românească. Din punct de vedere metodologic, vom examina aceste transformări literare și culturale prin plasarea unui studiu de caz particular în cadrele ideologice ale capitalismului neoliberal așa cum se manifestă pe platformele de streaming. Studiul nostru de caz abordează emisiunea de pe Twitch și YouTube a lui reallyrux, „Cine-i janghina?”, unde spectatorii trimit scurte povestiri așa-zis autobiografice, având la bază teme prestabilite, axate pe conflicte plurivalente. Gazda citește și discută poveștile în cadrul live stream-urilor, evaluând în glumă stilul lor și sugerând în același timp că emisiunea îmbunătățește cunoștințele literare ale publicului, situând-o astfel atât ca divertisment participativ, cât și ca atelier informal. În consecință, scopul studiului nostru este triplu: în primul rând, să analizeze relația mutuală a literarului și digitalului, mai exact, a conținutului bazat pe platforme; în al doilea rând, să investigheze revitalizarea genului prozei scurte în contextul tendinței predominante a atelierelor de scriere creativă din România și a practicilor digitale participative; și, în al treilea rând, să evalueze natura imediateții povestirii post-mileniale și implicațiile sale ideologice mai ample. Prin explorarea intersecției dintre platformele media, cultura participativă și producția literară, această lucrare deslușește modul în care limitele narațiunii se dezvoltă în era capitalismului de platformă.

**Cuvinte-cheie:** *proză scurtă, autobiografie, social media, Twitch, Youtube, capitalism de platformă, neoliberalism, semi-periferie, Europa Centrală și de Est.*

## Introduction

In contemporary debates on the digital sphere, it is impossible to overlook the public personas who have come to dominate the platform industry, establishing themselves as the leading forces in online political influence. As such, Elon Musk, (self-)referred to as a “Free Speech Absolutist” (Marcetic 2022), has emerged as a central figure within the technological oligarchy associated with the current U.S. President Donald Trump. He now epitomizes the height of digital right-wing politics, as he “has transformed Twitter in record time into a global amplifier” of such rhetoric (Amlinger and Nachtwey 2025). As Ștefan Baghiu recently claims, “[p]olitics isn’t just performed on platforms anymore – it’s being written, directed, and monetised by them” (2025, 1). In the Romanian political landscape, Musk’s recently rebranded platform, X, serves as a space for far-right sovereigntist politicians, such as the prominent representative of the Alliance for the Union of Romanians (AUR), George Simion, to express their support for him and the broader Trumpist agenda, “hoping that Trump’s presidency will weaken the EU and its domestic allies therewith” (Rogozanu 2025).

Furthermore, digital platforms have proven themselves to be highly potent ideological tools during last year’s Romanian presidential election, bringing unexpected notoriety to a candidate that was otherwise unknown to the public. It is indisputable that Călin Georgescu, whose close affiliations with Romania’s interwar fascist political faction have since become widely recognised, would not have emerged as the dark horse of the 2024 election without an aggressive high-impact campaign carried out on platforms such as TikTok, Facebook, and YouTube. Through these channels, orchestrating a deliberate spectacle of performative “anti-establishment” anger, he and his wife disseminated a New Age type of mysticism, as Elena Trifan (2025) notes, and an unyielding nationalist agenda to audiences largely unaware of his underlying ideological foundations and misled by the platforms’ “[s]mart power with a liberal, friendly appearance” (Han 2017, 15), especially when contrasted with older, overtly politicised and antagonised media such as television, which are nearing their downturn (Gripsrud 2004).

However, platforms are neither ideologically neutral nor exclusively dominated by far-right content. Rather, they offer a venue for diverse ideological currents to emerge, including a growing trend of progressive discourse, which this article seeks to examine. Consequently, engaging with the broader political context is essential to our analysis. A case in point is reallyrux’s Twitch and YouTube channels, which advance a perspective centred on social commentary, advocating for social inclusion, LGBTQIA+ rights, and a specific strand of feminism which we will delve into in the third part of our article. Furthermore,

given our study's literary focus, we highlight how reallyrux actively promotes the writing of short stories that reflect queer, ethnic, and class-conscious narratives, among other intersecting concerns, intentionally positioning her content in opposition to the ways Romanian politicians have leveraged digital platforms for political purposes. To cite the "About" section of her Twitch channel, her main streaming series, "Cine-i janghina?," is described as "a show inspired by AITA, the popular Reddit thread, but with a twist: I read real stories sent by members of the community and deliver the final verdict – whether they, or the other people involved in the story, are the 'janghina' (the asshole) of the situation" (reallyrux "About," our translation). By placing reallyrux's channel within the broader Twitch streaming landscape in Romania, we aim to contextualise its ideological orientation and briefly address its interactions with other streamers inclined to progressive rhetorics. In the context of the 2024 election, reallyrux, alongside the aforementioned streamers, has openly articulated her critique of dominant nationalist-populist agendas. Although reallyrux primarily positions herself as a Twitch content creator, often encouraging her YouTube audience to join her weekly Twitch livestreams, this article focuses on her YouTube series due to its greater accessibility and its curated nature, featuring only the most engaging stories selected by her team as highlights from the Twitch streams. This preference is further justified by YouTube's broader popularity among Romanian audiences compared to Twitch's smaller communities. Accordingly, the entire YouTube series, comprising 179 episodes at the time of writing, forms the corpus of our case study.

Although the political sphere has served as the primary site for the consolidation of platform power globally, the Romanian context reveals a parallel dynamic wherein the digitalisation of everyday life, accelerated during the Covid-19 pandemic, facilitated platform expansion. As Emanuel Copilaș argues, Romania's transition from oligarchic to digital capitalism was catalysed by the pandemic, with technocratic elites exploiting state incapacity to reposition digital infrastructures as both inevitable and superior: "[m]aking use of the restrictions brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic, technocratic capitalism is rapidly converting itself into digital capitalism" (Copilaș 2021, 93). In this context, key sectors such as education, administration, and healthcare underwent accelerated digitalisation, with concomitant attempts at privatisation framed as crisis management. Cultural and political life similarly shifted onto platforms, a trend that not only persisted but intensified post-pandemic. Twitch, for instance, which had already attained international prominence, gained traction in Romania during this period, importing global streaming practices and fostering a notable group of politically engaged streamers. This shift enabled the Romanian Twitch and YouTube streaming community to evolve beyond its gaming-centric roots (Jarret

2008; Burgess and Green 2009; Taylor 2018; Woodcock and Johnson 2019), which had already solidified its popularity within the Romanian online landscape, and to integrate ideologically informed social commentary into its mainstream framework.

Since such neoliberal digital transformations inform our methodological approach, we must first establish the definition of neoliberalism that guides our discussion. In this article, neoliberalism is understood, in Harvey's (2005) key, as an economic and cultural project that promotes individual freedom, free trade, and ostensibly self-regulating free markets through privatisation, deregulation, and an emphasis on the rule of law, while simultaneously concealing the restoration of class power. Following Slobodian (2018, 4), it also entails the institutional "encasement" of markets, designing structures not to liberate them but to shield capitalism from democratic pressures, to discipline perceived irrationalities in human behaviour, and to sustain a global order of competing states where borders serve as a functional economic role. As far as the local setting is concerned, a defining feature of Romanian neoliberalism, according to Cornel Ban (2014, 216), is that it only became a practical reality after neoliberal economic theories circulated among the political class in the aftermath of the 1989 revolution, effectively foreclosing local social and economic alternatives to the transition crisis. As a result, the political elite placed significant emphasis on attracting external capital, making Romania's neoliberal trajectory one characterised by dependency on its Western counterparts. As Ban notes,

[t]he conditionalities imposed by international financial institutions, the absence of a sufficiently developed national bourgeoisie, and the difficulties of neo-developmental experiments in countries such as Romania facilitated the translation of these ideas into practice (2014, 216, our translation).

Thus, Romanian neoliberalism remains underdeveloped, insufficiently regulated compared to other contexts, and prone to generating recurrent crises. Its dependency also extends into the cultural sphere, including the digital ecosystem, which is the focus of this study. Labour, in Romania's semiperipheral position, has thus been increasingly dematerialised and subsumed into freelancing, including monetised streaming practices, where storytelling and political discourse alike are commodified products of "neoliberalisation" (Deckard and Shapiro 2019, 15), symptomatic of a gigification tendency within the "neoliberal world-culture." Apart from the labour behind streaming, the content itself reflects, as we emphasise, Romania's relatively nascent neoliberal dynamics, dependent on (and shaped by) Western trends and tailored for local tastes.

While Emanuel Copilaș initiates a discussion on digital capitalism, more recent articles by Ștefan Baghiu refer to our contemporary era as platform capitalism. In this context, Baghiu examines how platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, and even TikTok have emerged as new spaces for literary criticism. He argues that post-millennial literary criticism has been shaped by the demands of digital cultural and symbolic capital, what he terms “the clout,” and by an algorithmised, “clickbait” mentality (Baghiu 2024, 157). According to Baghiu, literature is increasingly commodified through the pacification of criticism, with the critic’s “I” functioning as a form of self-promotion. As a result, literary criticism has largely abandoned its institutionalised structures, with digital literary magazines now serving as primary platforms for critical expression. However, Baghiu observes that what initially seemed to be the “de-radicalisation” of criticism is, in fact, counterbalanced by a heightened “radicalisation” of political involvement, which has become more coherent than ever before (Baghiu 2024, 172). Previously, in a related discussion, Adriana Stan introduces the concept of “digicriticism” to describe the transition from print-based literary criticism to a digital discourse shaped by market forces and consumer-driven engagement. She highlights that “the digital expanding of literary culture into the public domain involves both the literary object, usually a book, and the commentary or review meant to help sell it” (Stan 2022, 271). This shift, she argues, has fostered “an artificial, hothouse climate of diffuse and equalising celebration” (Stan 2022, 272), reflecting the broader impact of digital media on literary culture.

Adriana Stan’s contribution builds upon Alan Kirby’s concept of “digimodernism” (2009); however, neither her 2022 study nor Baghiu’s 2024 article directly engage with the transformation of literary production in an era wherein the prefix “digi-” becomes an unavoidable qualifier. Their approaches remain largely metacritical, reflecting on the state of literary criticism or critique more broadly. This focus is understandable: while there is an undeniable interdependence between the literary and the digital (evident in the online promotion of literary works, the pre-publication of excerpts in digital magazines, and the increasing use of platforms by publishing houses: e.g., short-form poetry posts on Instagram), literature has not been fully subsumed by platform capitalism. Whilst Baghiu thoughtfully notes that “traditional politics is outmatched in the age of platform capitalism” (2025, 3), we are led to question whether traditional poetics and paradigms for conceiving the literary have similarly begun to erode, slowly giving way to new valorisations of literature on digital platforms (appreciated increasingly for their entertainment and therapeutic functions) and to new modes of actualisation, namely emerging forms of writing shaped by the prevailing climate of the digital environment. In that sense, our study does not approach the literary sphere as a fixed, inactive product, but rather aims to

explore the inner machinations of its active transformation. In the midst of this transformation, Twitch has emerged as a space where a post-millennial community engages in an informal, non-institutional literary process, signalling the new development of a “constellation of social and cultural parameters that shape the predominant understanding and *use* of literature” (Tihanov 2019, 1).

Thus, our survey is driven by two main factors: first, the emergence of platforms as essential tools in the political venue, and second, the amplification of their presence in daily life due to the pandemic. Since digital platforms can be readily instrumentalised for ideological purposes, their underlying ideological structure cannot be overlooked, even in analyses that focus on literary circulation within digital ecosystems. Accordingly, one of our central arguments draws on Anna Kornbluh’s (2024) theorisation of contemporary culture as marked by a crisis of meaning, a condition she attributes to the hyper-circulatory logic of late capitalism. In the final section of this paper, we will engage more directly with her framework to explore how this dynamic informs the current conditions of literary production and reception. While research on platforms is extensive (Tarleton 2010; Srnicek 2017; Woodcock 2021), their exploration within the Romanian context remains relatively underdeveloped. Our focus is primarily literary and ideological, grounded in our background in literary studies. The question arises: what is the complex of conditions which triggered the enmeshment of platforms in the fibre of contemporary literature and, specifically, short fiction? In this regard, we observe a growing trend in what we term “the platformisation of storytelling.”

### **Short Story in the Platform Age: New Frontiers of Literary Entertainment**

In his 2019 volume, Galin Tihanov notes that the transition to what he identifies as the third regime of relevance (following the first, which valorised Romantic aestheticism, and the second, oriented towards social agendas) signals a shift in which literature increasingly assumes roles of entertainment and therapeutic engagement. Accordingly, a broader global trend resonates with this observation, as illustrated by Alexandre Gefen’s mapping of contemporary therapeutic literature in France, which “can be extended beyond French literature to encompass world literature, as both core and (semi-) peripheral literary systems increasingly reflect the reparative role he identifies in his examples” (Vişan and Danieleescu 2025). Gefen contends that “literature is a good way to obtain a ‘certificate of existence’” (Gefen 2024, 46). Following this line of thought, online autobiographical storytelling, which is the focus of our analysis, emerges as a powerful means of asserting and rendering one’s existence visible.

Tihanov (2019, 24) contends that literature's validation as a therapeutic and entertaining medium increasingly intersects with a redefined paradigm of social relevance, evident in debates over identity politics and the curation of minority, national, and global canons. As this article demonstrates, digital short stories (or storytelling itself, disseminated via platforms like Twitch and YouTube)<sup>3</sup> actively engage with identity politics, particularly through queer and feminist narratives, thereby fulfilling both ethical and civic functions. Although contemporary Romanian literature increasingly embraces an ethics of care, this section of the article turns to the digital sphere, which has emerged as a key arena within Romanian culture where literature's entertainment-driven function now predominates. To bridge the digital and the literary, we introduce the concept of the "platformisation of storytelling," a term that captures how the growing prominence of storytelling across digital platforms mirrors the rising engagement with contemporary short prose in the Romanian literary field. In particular, platforms such as Twitch and YouTube have become major entertainment hubs where short stories have found new audiences among media consumers.

In this context, Yesol Seo's notion of "storymetaloguing" becomes particularly relevant: she defines it as the continuous reinterpretation and expansion of meaning through audience interaction, resulting in layered narrative structures that span various media and platforms, including social media, interactive art, and video games (Seo 2024, 9). Within the digital entertainment paradigm, storytelling is thus marked by its immersive quality and the collaborative dynamics shaping both creative and interpretive practices. While Seo's concept originates in a broader sociological analysis of storytelling practices, our focus is specifically literary, examining how short story writing has entered a distinctly digital phase in an Eastern European context. Moreover, this transition has contributed to the growing popularity of digital storytelling, often outpacing traditional print-based short story production. Against the background of the contemporary cultural support for short prose, this section investigates a parallel phenomenon in order to capture the evolving dynamics of digital literary production.

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<sup>3</sup> It is important to clarify from the outset that for the purposes of this article we adopt a deliberately broad definition of the short story, one that encompasses not only conventional storytelling but also forms of auto-writing, life writing, fan-fiction, collaborative fiction, and autobiographical prose. Our primary criterion is not generic purity, but rather textual length and structure, specifically the kind of prose that lend itself to being read aloud within the temporal constraints of a live-streaming format.



## I. “The Wave of Short Story”: Historical Underpinnings

The short story has historically occupied a pivotal yet structurally marginal position within Romanian literary production, its trajectory being deeply intertwined with the development of the novel. Romania’s post-1948 integration into the Soviet sphere inaugurated a period of ideological instrumentalisation, wherein the novel was institutionally privileged under the rubric of socialist realism. Nevertheless, initial collapse marked the 1950s, with a partial recovery only after the cultural “thaw” of the 1960s, what Terian terms “the second rise of the Romanian novel” (2019a, 64). Short prose, by contrast, remained peripheral, though the 1970s and early 1980s witnessed a partial re-legitimisation through major anthologies (Regman 1974; Ciobanu 1979; Iorgulescu 1981; George 1982; *Desant 83* 1983). These interventions carved out spaces for experimentation within a literary field that, while only marginally ideologically liberalised, remained dominated by the long-form narrative. Moreover, the so-called “postmodernist” generation of Romanian writers turned to the publication of short stories as a means of legitimising their rupture from earlier literary paradigms, ranging from interwar and socialist modernism to the socialist realism institutionalised during the Soviet period. Generally, their aesthetic choices were imbued with a distinct political agency: by advocating a rapid alignment with Western-style neoliberalism, Romanian postmodernists effectively precluded, as Adriana Stan argues (2021), the leftist critiques that had underpinned Western variants of postmodernism.

The post-1989 transitional period (1990–2000) saw a steep decline in local novel production, saturated instead by translations and an unresolved critical project of canonising the “communist novel” (Terian 2019a, 67; Iovănel 2021). For instance, Terian’s quantitative analysis of literary production in Romania in 2013 (2019b, 38), including both translated and original works, as well as literature for children and adults, indicates that, although poetry and novels dominated in terms of volume, short prose maintained a significant presence, with 585 titles classified as locally authored short fiction for adult readers. Although the 2010s brought a quantitative resurgence of the novel, the re-emergence of short prose as a fashionable form could go hand in hand with a broader cultural logic, reflecting the valorisation of fragmentariness, immediacy, and modular consumption symptomatic of internalised neoliberal ideas (Ban 2016). Given this context, the attention span of contemporary cultural consumers, symptomatic of broader transformations in reading habits (shaped by the frequent scrolling through TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook reels, where content is designed to be short, impactful, and to encourage continuous, passive engagement), further exemplifies how literary forms and literary understanding are increasingly conditioned by the socio-material and economic infrastructures. As Bogdan Crețu notes,

[s]hort prose has to grab the attention of Instagram and TikTok users and get them excited. More than ever, it's all about intensity, tension, and efficiency. It has discarded everything that could be perceived as superfluous, it has become "deliteraturised" (which is also a literary strategy), it has turned towards narrative pragmatism, taking on increasingly compressed forms, such as flash fiction. (2025, our translation)

Before addressing the platformisation of literary production, it is necessary to contextualise contemporary fiction within its recent historical arc, which echoes the development of a "wave of short story," to paraphrase Thomsen's formulation (2023, 91). Institutional interest in the short story was renewed with Marius Chivu's *Best of: proza scurtă a anilor 2000* (2013), continued with Cosmin Perța's *Pasageri* (2019), and further consolidated through Chivu's *Kiwi* series (2021). Meanwhile, Cristina Ispas and Victor Cobuz's *Retroversiuni* anthologies (2023; 2024; 2025) intervened critically in the gendered structures of literary production. Authors such as Lavinia Braniște, Simona Goșu, and Florin Lăzărescu, among others, consolidated the genre through autonomous volumes, while *Iocan* magazine functioned as an incubator for contemporary short prose voices. In 2023, the online literary platform *Nesemnate* added a layer of active (inter-platform) audience participation to the anthologisation of Romanian prose and poetry (Dumitru 2023). In its incipient stage, the platform exclusively offered a selection of anonymous short stories, encouraging its users (not only through its own website, but also through frequent Facebook posts) to guess the author of each text based on literary style. The popularity of *Nesemnate*, as well as its subsequent expansion to other literary modes, is demonstrative of a platformising tendency.

The recent proliferation of short story production correlates with the emergence of a creative writing culture in Romania, a phenomenon mirroring global trends of neoliberal self-optimisation through pedagogical and therapeutic workshops (Gog and Simionca 2020). While creative writing mentorship had long been institutionalised in Western contexts, Romania only formalised such practices in the 2010s, thereby distinguishing them from the earlier "cenaclu" (literary circle) model. The watershed moment arrived in 2012 with Florin Iaru and Marius Chivu's structured workshops, explicitly adapting Anglo-American pedagogical frameworks. This initiative catalysed a proliferation of programmes within cultural institutions and literary publications, consolidated by figures such as Dumitru Crudu (in Chișinău, Republic of Moldova) and Cosmin Perța.

Initiated in response to the post-socialist stagnation of literary production, these programmes aimed not only to democratise access, attracting participants from diverse socio-professional backgrounds, but also to address systemic deficits: a narrow literary market, precarious publication circuits, and the structural

impossibility of sustaining a livelihood through writing alone. The drive toward professionalisation, now refracted through market logics and self-optimisation discourses, paradoxically recalls the professional status writing acquired under the socialist regime, albeit within a system where literary production was subsumed to ideological apparatuses and materially supported by these apparatuses (Macrea-Toma 2009; Rogozanu 2024).

In parallel with the institutionalisation of creative writing within universities, independent workshops have proliferated. A paradigmatic example is Cristian Fulaş, who, following a series of paid workshops, published a volume of essays on contemporary Romanian writing practices (2025). While such initiatives diversify the field, they also risk entrenching outdated theoretical frameworks and normative ideologies of writing. Thus, Romania's creative writing culture reflects both the global circulation of pedagogical models and a context-specific effort to revitalise a historically underdeveloped sector of national culture.

## **II. A Platform-Mediated Comeback**

The digital has come to parallel the mentorship practices recently established in Romania. For instance, our case study focuses on reallyrux's channels, which foster an online environment dedicated to the production of literary content, specifically, as we argue, short fiction, alongside practices of listening to readings, interpreting the material, and offering commentary on both literary style and the perceived talent (or lack thereof) of anonymous text submitters. Since the series' inception, reallyrux has uploaded 179 episodes on Youtube, as evident in the playlist "'Cine-i Janghina?' Show" (reallyrux 2023). The most recent thematic development, introduced through viewer-submitted stories, focuses on "retro" narratives drawn from the family histories of the audience. We highlight this shift because it marks a significant evolution: viewers are no longer solely composing autobiographical short fictions but are now also engaging in the fictionalisation of familial memories, thereby closely mirroring broader literary processes of narrative construction and re-imagination.

Before turning to the show's undertaking of memorialised and immediatised narratives, it is crucial to first map the thematic spectrum of the show and its place within broader digital communities. The host curates the storytelling process by providing specific prompts, thus channeling the collective narrative production towards socially resonant and affectively charged domains. The dominant thematic clusters include: affective and romantic conflict (narratives of infidelity, insecure masculinity, maternal enmeshment, weddings, love triangles,

rivalry, and experiences mediated by digital dating platforms such as Tinder and Bumble<sup>4</sup>); kinship tensions and familial dysfunction (including the figure of the “black sheep,” intergenerational conflicts, and intra-familial rivalries); student precarity and youth sociality (experiences related to housing insecurity, complaints about student-faculty conflicts, peer solidarity, partying, travelling, and friendship); engagements with spirituality and the supernatural (ghost stories, superstitions, accounts of religious rites such as funerals and masses for the dead, seasonal observances tied to Easter and Christmas traditions); and, finally, labour market alienation (stories of exploitation, precarity, and navigating the asymmetries of contemporary employment practices).

The categorisation of these narratives within the field of contemporary Romanian short fiction derives not merely from their formal attributes but also from their platform-specific modalities of circulation and reception. Designed to accommodate a single performative reading, these texts typically extend across five to seven Word pages, adhering to the principle of narrative economy, and are subjected to a curatorial mechanism prior to dissemination: reallyrux’s editorial team selects (and edits) submissions for grammatical coherence (to ensure oral legibility), formal adequacy, thematic relevance, and narrative appeal. This selection process replicates, in a platformised and oralised register, the functions historically associated with literary periodicals, thereby establishing a digital archive of storytelling. It is also worth noting that the channels’ editors remove or censor certain elements of the submissions which do not align with the ideological foundation of the series, including bigoted remarks and any sensitive information shared without the consent of those involved in the stories.

In terms of reception, it must be underlined that the host’s commentary consistently foregrounds stylistic analysis, often evaluating the presence or absence of literary tropes and implicitly measuring the narrative sophistication of the authors. Frequently, both the host and the audience speculate, half-seriously, on the prospective literary careers of particularly skilled contributors. Despite the ironic undertone, both host and audience treat these texts as conventional literary works, as exemplified by the episode “Romeo & Juliette Românesc” [“Romanian Romeo & Juliette”] (reallyrux 2024), which frames the narrative within a familiar canonical paradigm. Thus, the participatory culture fostered by the platform, while subversive of institutional hierarchies, paradoxically re-inscribes conventional aesthetic norms, attesting to the resilience of inherited categories of literary legitimacy even within the fluid infrastructures of platform storytelling.

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<sup>4</sup> For a sociological account of dating apps in Romania, see Pozsar, Dumitrescu, Piticaș, Constantinescu 2018.

Moreover, the autobiographical inflection of the submitted narratives reflects the broader global turn towards autofictional and testimonial modes (Stan 2023; Gilmore 2023), symptomatic in 2000s Romania of the reconfiguration of literary value around experiential authenticity and the minoritarian voice. However, this democratisation of narrative space is dialectically entangled with processes of anonymisation: while platforms seemingly enable the articulation of personal histories otherwise hindered from public discourse, they simultaneously necessitate the erasure of authorial identity, thus exposing the contradiction of contemporary cultural production wherein visibility and invisibility are co-constitutive.

It is noteworthy that reallyrux's content extends beyond texts produced within or specifically for the channel. For example, in a recent episode of "secret discret" [Discrete Secret], a companion series hosted by reallyrux, a nostalgic literary reference from the host's childhood (namely, Caprice Crane's book *Sunt aiurită și se ia!* [Stupid and Contagious], translated in 2007 in Romania by Ana Dragomirescu) prompted an immediate and measurable response from the audience. The referenced text quickly sold out on the resale platform Vinted, an occurrence visibly documented during the livestream itself, demonstrating the platform's capacity to catalyse literary consumption in real time. In response, reallyrux humorously suggested the creation of an informal reading circle, encouraging viewers to recirculate their copies after reading in order to maintain the text's accessibility and communal circulation (reallyrux 2025).

Within this framework, it becomes evident that the short fiction pieces featured in the series "Cine-i janghina?" function as deliberate literary entertainment products, designed to elicit both affective engagement and participatory culture among viewers. Furthermore, this environment facilitates the conceptual repositioning of literature not as a static artifact of the past, but as a culturally contingent discourse subject to ongoing rearticulations in response to the shifting epistemic frameworks and socio-cultural demands of a given historical moment.

### **Pink Twitch: Entertainment Feminism and Immediacy-Driven Literary Form**

As previously indicated, the emergence of reallyrux's shows must be situated within a specific communitarian configuration that has characterised recent Romanian Twitch culture. The first creators to advance progressive social commentary and politically inclusive content within this environment were Silviu Istrate (known as Faiăr) and Alexandru Zlăvog, whose collaborative enterprise gained notable visibility during the pandemic and has continued to grow significantly since, culminating in their attainment of visibility even

among the political groups they had previously criticised. Notably, these politicians have since pejoratively labelled such streamers and influencers as “sexo-marxists,” a term deployed by Romanian conservatives to disparagingly conflate PC, cancel culture, and identity politics (Terian 2022, 112).

Subsequently, their associates, such as Sebastian Moroșanu (Elmurorosa) and Andrei Petroff (NicknamedPete), have also ascended into the ranks of Romania’s most-followed Twitch streamers, according to *TwitchTracker*. In contrast, reallyrux, currently positioned third in terms of follower count, attracting approximately 1,700 viewers per stream (*TwitchTracker*), has cultivated a distinct audience demographic. As acknowledged both by the streamer herself and as reflected in her reliance on viewer-submitted narratives, her community predominantly comprises women and queer/queer-friendly viewers. In light of these gendered dynamics, we propose, for heuristic purposes, a differentiation between a “Pink-side” and a “Blue-side” of Romanian Twitch. While this division is necessarily schematic and carries certain risks of oversimplification, it nevertheless proves analytically productive: it permits a sharper methodological focus on the gendered dimensions of streaming-based literary production, and enables a more nuanced exploration of storytelling practices and short prose writing among Romania’s post-millennial generation.

We deploy the heuristic categories of “Pink Twitch” and “Blue Twitch” to foreground the gendered logic of platform marketing, analogous to the differential branding strategies employed in the promotion of gendered consumer goods (such as personal hygiene products), where even visual cues like colour schemes are mobilised to signal gendered appeal. In this framework, “Blue Twitch” channels tend to cater to traditionally masculinised interests and modes of interaction: they prioritise video game and sports content, feature commentary on male-oriented digital subcultures (e.g., pick-up artistry or financial self-help), and are often mediated by hosts who cultivate a persona of unfiltered banter, frequently incorporating coarse or provocative language. By contrast, “Pink Twitch” channels center feminised domains of affect and consumption, offering content related to fashion, beauty, and interpersonal advice, often framed through a tone of friendliness, emotional attentiveness, and aesthetic softness, and, most importantly, “a space for women to talk about their own experiences, an atmosphere of affirmation and affiliated listening” (Gill 2007). This feminisation is reflected in the channels’ visual identity as well; for instance, reallyrux’s stream design prominently features a pink and purple interface. Notably, while a “Blue” channel can performatively pivot toward a more inclusive or feminised audience (Zlăvog’s “DM-uri दिली” [Demented DMs]), which features viewer-submitted messages from women, being a case in point, such shifts are significantly less feasible for “Pink” channels. The latter’s identity is

often premised on their function as safe, non-hostile environments for women and queer individuals, rendering cross-demographic repositioning both socially and discursively constrained.

In this section, building on the aforementioned gendered delineation, we seek to interrogate the ideological substratum structuring reallyrux's digital literary production. This inquiry culminates in our central argument: that the entanglement of the literary and the digital produces a cultural artifact, the platformised form of short story, that is fully embedded within, and symptomatic of, what Kornbluh identifies as "[t]he twenty-first-century concentration on circulation, with its premium on flow," conditioning "immediacy as cultural style that immanentizes presence, eclipses relay, and negates mediation" (2024). Accordingly, we propose a dual analytical orientation: first, toward the ways in which the feminism articulated through reallyrux's platform operates within, and is co-opted by, a neoliberal logic predicated on circulation and affective immediacy; and second, toward understanding the very form of the short story as a product shaped by the "disintermediated infrastructure of immediacy style" (Kornbluh 2024), foregrounding the ways in which literary production on digital platforms is conditioned by "too late-capitalist" modes of cultural and temporal compression and, moreover, structured by core-periphery dynamics intrinsic to the capitalist world-system, echoing Moretti's model of modern novel diffusion. Widely known, his statement argues that the world-literary production is characterised by "a compromise between foreign form and local materials" (Moretti 2000, 60), ultimately bringing forth a distinct local articulation. This model proves apposite in the case of reallyrux's show, which appropriates a U.S.-originated digital storytelling format and refunctions it within a Romanian cultural context, thus bringing forth a localised variant of the short story in sync with the global circulatory logic of the digital economy. Processes of delocalisation and relocalisation of such literary forms unfold at the speed of light in the digital sphere. Even within a system marked by combined and uneven development (WReC 2015), the digital works as a compensatory medium for literary production, enabling rapid alignment with transformations occurring in core cultures, such as the U.S.

For a critical theorist such as Kornbluh, video stream is the triumphant by-product of contemporary actualisations of capitalism. Since contemporary fiction increasingly evacuates fictionality itself, practices of auto-writing in the age of video streaming have come to exemplify this voiding dynamic by postulating the illusion of sense or fictionality. While Kornbluh identifies immediacy as a defining feature of contemporary cultural style, it is salient to emphasise that the experience of platform-based media, such as video streaming, is in fact mediated by highly complex technological infrastructures. What appears immediate is not the technology itself, but the experience it enables. This perceived immediacy is

precisely the result of sophisticated systems designed to obscure their own complexity, thereby the illusion of directness and spontaneity. These dynamics are not merely aesthetic but symptomatic of deeper ideological shifts in the function of storytelling under platform capitalism.

Short fiction, as repurposed through reallyrux's series (primarily functioning as entertainment and as a micro-industry of self-help) has reached a critical juncture, becoming an object of binge consumption due to its platformised, oralised delivery, as evidenced by the ritualised gestures of story-submitters, who routinely greet Twitch and YouTube audiences and encourage them to "enjoy their meal." The current configuration of the short story is marked by its acceleration: rapidly composed (given the weekly rhythm of new prompts), rapidly disseminated through live reading (in response to the continuous capitalist demand for fresh episodes), and rapidly circulated, with most texts occupying the spotlight of collective discussion for only five to twenty minutes before receding into anonymity. In the age of gigification, this phenomenon points to an unparalleled intensification in the production of storytelling, at least within the Romanian semiperipheral literary system. Here, self-expression becomes paramount, generating a ceaseless flow of personality-based entertainment, as "content creators wield their only asset: expression of their inner life. Your story is something to own" (Kornbluh 2024).

Additionally, the digital narrative, as a mere "listening experience," functions as an algorithmised space for the continuous consumption of customised content. In order for a text to be "published," it must conform to a shared framework: a focus on the highly relatable memorialisation of life experiences, followed by an ideological premise accompanying them. While the thematic dimension of the series has already been tackled in relation to the customised content, it is now essential to examine the ideological foundations underpinning the social commentary embedded within this content. Although many of reallyrux's interventions in her streams are framed through a leftist progressive lens, oriented toward identity politics, there is a more complex dimension at play.

In the aftermath of the Cold War, feminist and gender studies discourses entered the East-Central European cultural and academic spaces largely via the circuitous channels of NGO-isation, eventually achieving institutional consolidation throughout the 2000s (Cîrstocea 2022). In the digital era, queer-feminist discourses, both as isolated ideological formations and as activist praxis, have increasingly been subsumed by neoliberal currents. This trend reflects the broader structural dynamics of Romania's post-socialist transition. While it would be methodologically reductive to critique the ideological efficacy of an individual freelance content creator operating on Twitch and YouTube, it is nevertheless productive to briefly interrogate the modalities of feminism



articulated through reallyrux's platform. This allows us to sketch a preliminary cartography of leftist engagement within streaming communities, whose practices of social commentary have become increasingly central to the affective and ideological formation of their audiences.

In line with Rottenberg's account of neoliberal feminism, the discourse articulated online by reallyrux (a type of discourse shared, it should be noted, by other figures such as the aforementioned Faiăr and Zlăvog) pivots around an individualistic subjectivity "mobilised to convert continued gender inequality from a structural problem into an individual affair" (2018, 55), precisely the mechanism through which this strand of feminism reconfigures structural critique into personal responsibility. This strategic emphasis on visibility and commercial viability gives rise to a particular articulation of feminist discourse within reallyrux's content, one that avoids (partly due to constraints provisioned by the platforms' politics) overtly radical or oppositional rhetoric in favour of an accessible language of individual empowerment embedded within normative expressions of femininity. While this femininity is frequently framed through the aesthetics of self-care and beautification (understood in relatively conventional and commodified terms), it is nonetheless intersected by themes such as bodily autonomy, reproductive rights, and resistance to gender-based violence and systemic misogyny. As such, reallyrux's channels align with what can be termed "entertainment feminism," a discursive mode also evident in mainstream cultural productions such as Greta Gerwig's 2023 *Barbie* (Byrnes, Loreck and May 2024). This form of feminism prioritises mass accessibility which, while conducive to monetisation, also operates pedagogically as an entry point into broader feminist imaginaries.

Rather than dismissing this orientation as ideologically diluted, it may be more productive to interpret it as a form of gateway feminism (See Keller and Ringrose 2015; Rivers 2017, 72-73) or even "feminist pedagogy" (Hannell 2024, 115), one that facilitates engagement with feminist ideas in a manner calibrated to the discursive expectations and cultural fluency of the intended audience. Crucially, reallyrux's channel does not position itself as a site of theoretical critique or ideological instruction; its efficacy lies in its ability to mobilise support for feminist causes (both discursively and materially) without alienating its audience through abstraction or polemics. In this respect, it does not align with the vision of a "feminism for the 99%," as proposed by Cinzia Arruzza, Tithi Bhattacharya, and Nancy Fraser (2019); rather, it functions more as an introductory framework for popularising feminist ideas and practices grounded in identity politics. As such, it should also be noted that certain live streams are organised explicitly for the purpose of raising charitable donations, most often directed towards queer and feminist NGOs. Although reallyrux's

Twitch and YouTube series are not explicitly framed as introductory feminist primers, they nonetheless contribute to fostering an understanding of feminist ideas among the post-millennial generation.

Nonetheless, central to this configuration is the valorisation of individual identity construction and its manifold expressions, which are celebrated above all else. In her 2013 article, Nancy Fraser advocates for a reorientation of feminism toward its foundational aim of confronting systemic inequalities, rather than reinforcing narratives of individual achievement at the expense of collective empowerment. She argues that feminism has been appropriated by the neoliberal global order, thereby marginalising concerns about economic inequality. Fraser thus calls for renewed efforts to challenge the structural dynamics of capitalism. While reallyrux's channel centres predominantly on individual experience and expression, rendering it less directly aligned with Fraser's critique, it is noteworthy that recurring, albeit secondary, comments highlight capitalism as a fundamental issue warranting critical attention.

Although reallyrux's degree of political engagement remains relatively moderate, these interventions nevertheless constitute a significant countercurrent within a socio-cultural landscape, including the digital, increasingly saturated by "anti-genderist and anti-feminist ideas" (Huțanu and Tite 2024, 102), red/blue pill ideologies, incel communities, and the fandom surrounding figures such as the Tate brothers. At the same time, it must be acknowledged that such platform-mediated articulations of feminism remain structurally consonant with the logic of the evolving global economic order, an order predicated on the continuous reproduction of systemic inequality.

## Conclusion

This article has interrogated the intersecting trajectories of the literary and the digital, foregrounding the contemporary regime of relevance which, as delineated by Tihanov, valorises literature primarily for its entertaining and therapeutic functions. Recognising platforms as inherent spaces of spectacle, we have examined the manner in which they have appropriated the literary, subjecting it to the logic and imperatives of platform capitalism. Our analysis has focused on the emergent trend of short story production for streaming environments, with the Romanian Twitch and YouTube streamer reallyrux's series "Cine-i janghina?" serving as an exemplary case of "platformised storytelling." For methodological and analytical purposes, we proposed a provisional distinction between "Blue Twitch" and "Pink Twitch," the latter indicative of an increasing engagement with digital storytelling and auto-writing, wherein the memorialisation

and fictionalisation of the self function as strategies for rendering subjectivity a commodifiable asset within the frameworks of contemporary platform capitalism.

From a historical standpoint, we contend that the current proliferation of short story production, evident in the surge of creative writing workshops and streaming content in contemporary Romanian culture, signals a digital reanimation of a form that could incorporate to a certain extent the literary in its traditional, institutionally sedimented configurations. Following Tihanov, we argue that the post-millennial conjuncture inaugurates a new understanding of the literary, producing a rupture with previous models of literary poetics and autonomy. Ideologically, we maintain that the platform-mediated short story has been refunctionalised to serve the imperatives of neoliberal circulation and consumption, aligning seamlessly with the temporalities and affective economies of a “too late capitalist” order.

In the wake of sustained Marxist interventions in contemporary world literature studies (for instance, Moretti 2000; WReC 2015), it has become increasingly untenable to conceive of literary forms as autonomous from the turbulence of the capitalist world-system. Rather, forms must be understood as structurally enmeshed within its shifting totalities. The phenomenon under consideration thus exemplifies the literary’s capacity for formal modulation under a regime of relevance shaped by the platformisation of cultural production, marked by a systemic commodification of algorithmic circulation, and the temporal compression of aesthetic and ideological turnover. In the Romanian context, this may well herald a recalibration of literary culture, where the authority of print institutions is increasingly unsettled by digital-native practices, and where new modes of storytelling begin to redefine both the horizons of readership and authorship and the very terms of literary value in a postcanonical landscape.

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