

# CULTURAL MARKETING IN EUROPE AND ITS IMPACT ON LITERATURE. CASE STUDY: SYLVIA PLATH

C. PIPOŞ<sup>1</sup> M. FUNARU<sup>2</sup>

**Abstract:** *The present article aims to discuss the impact of marketing techniques on culture. Nowadays, not only goods are sold but ideas, images, feelings become available for trading. Still, it is not easy for culture to compete against other fields and sell its goods. As it is, cultural marketing is promoting all that is related to verbal communication, culture and arts. In order to understand the impact of marketing in the 20th century on culture we chose one of the poets that understood the importance of creating a cultural product that sells – Sylvia Plath and studied her beliefs on selling art.*

**Key words:** *cultural marketing, culture, cultural services, poetry, confession.*

## 1. Introduction. What is culture?

Culture is any product of thought and activity of human that is becoming a common good for society. It includes all tangible and intangible products of human beings. Culture refers to the symbols and values that are socially transmitted.

Taylor (1871, p.1) defines culture as “the whole complex which includes knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, law, customs and any other capabilities and habits acquired by individuals of a society”.

Any culture includes different systems of values. Still, values are among the essential components of a culture. (Adler, 1997, p. 15)

Furthermore, in general, culture represents the whole legacy of a company passed by word of mouth, writing or other forms of communication, and ways of life and thinking of society which are

transmitted from generation to generation. The culture reflects the human side of the economic environment. It is a collection of related behavioural and learning characteristics that are shared by members of society. (Sasu, C-tin., „Al. I. Cuza” University of Iaşi)

Culture has two components: material culture (concrete and tangible creations) and non-material culture (ideas, knowledge, opinions, values, norms, symbols, language, and gestures).

There are three main types of culture:

Popular culture - is typical of traditional and rural societies. On its level, it is formed and it develops the language of each community, its common knowledge of the world. All the information the community has becomes all the basic mythology of the community (which

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<sup>1</sup> PhD. Student, Dept. of Marketing, Tourism and International Relations, *Transilvania* University of Braşov.

<sup>2</sup> *Dimitrie Cantemir* Christian University.

actually attempts to understand the world), to develop fundamental ethical values. That is why the artistic expression of popular culture is its folklore.

On the other side, literate (high) culture is linked to the invention of writing and the development of printing techniques. Cultivated culture requires separation of the roles of creator and consumer of culture. Modern society and the general education system increasingly expand the area of beneficiaries and potential creators of cultivated culture.

Mass culture is characteristic of modernity. The emergence of mass culture is performed simultaneously with industrialization and modernization. It also requires industrialized production, is a culture industrially produced (there are: the industry of music, film, printing of books, and so on). Mass culture is addressed to the masses; it is created for them, but not by them. Mass culture specializes on genres and subgenres, these being specific to certain segments of the population. The most important characteristic of mass culture is that it is subordinate to the gain of profit.

Mass culture is therefore based on cultural industries.

Cultural industries refer to the creation, production of cultural goods and services in industrial, i.e. standardization, mass production, pursuit of profit.

Cultural industries include: television, cable, radio and publishing (especially in press), show, sport, cinema, audio devices and video production, advertising. The term of cultural industry belongs to Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer (1947).

The mass culture develops and enhances mass access to culture, mass culture being a process of public education. The public also influences cultural production.

## 2. Cultural services

According to data definitions of M. Moldoveanu and V. Ioan-Franc, cultural services are activities performed for the benefit of consumers of culture, with or without their direct participation in order to fulfil certain needs and to produce satisfactions expected by them. (Moldoveanu, M., Ioan-Franc, V., 1997, p. 20)

Cultural services represent a distinct category of services. Assessing their quality is made only by consumers and only after benefits are performed. Consumers buy services before they see their value. (Olteanu, V., Cetină, I., 1994, p. 36)

After the contents of benefits and resources used, cultural services are classified as: (Moldoveanu, M., Ioan-Franc, V., 1997, p. 50)

1. The entertainment: theatre, film, music, dance, arts groups, festivals.
2. Fine arts: art galleries and exhibitions, private collections, folk art.
3. Field of cultural products and services offered on specific broadcast media specialist:
  - Films, film studios, cinemas;
  - Books, magazines, publishing, exhibitions and book fairs, public readings services;
  - Artistic photography;
  - Audio-video tape and disc.
4. Institutional system to promote culture in human societies: libraries, museums, institutions theatres, philharmonic / opera, house of culture, cultural tourism agencies.
5. Mass communication together with the technical means for receiving, editing and dissemination of messages: print, radio, television, press agencies, studios, newsrooms broadcast networks.

The development of demand for culture and diversifying for services led to the assimilation from cultural level of some

marketing methods and techniques. Harmonization of offer with the needs of the consuming public is the strategic goal of any market agent.

### 3. Cultural marketing

Cultural marketing is aimed at promoting culture to the general public through specialized institutions and organizations. (Mayaux, F., 1987)

Marketing affirmation of culture involves assimilation at the theory and cultural action levels of marketing concepts, creating new concepts and enriching them with those of practical actions, experimenting new methods of investigating the consumption of culture and consumer behaviour, the development of tools for market forecasts of cultural phenomena. (Boier, R., 1994, p.57)

The cultural marketing approach involves market research, research of consumer needs and expectation, creating new needs in the market segments and anticipating existing ones.

Also, cultural marketing involves assessing the quality and size of the offer and its adaptation to consumer needs, investigating consumer satisfaction and motivation, and the cultural behaviours of the population. (Bondrea, A., 1993, p.78)

The cultural marketing mix focuses on four basic elements - product / service, price / tariff, distribution, promotion.

In cultural services, marketing mix features are highlighted in particular at the product level. (Brătucu, G., Boscia, D., p.22)

Also, at the cultural services, there are a number of specific variables linked to ambiance of benefits, the personnel involved and the participation of consumers. (Brătucu, G., Ispas, A., 1999, p.39)

### 4. Plath and cultural marketing

“But I feel I could write a best-seller” (Plath, S. 2000, p. 660)

Cultural marketing is reflected in literature. If romantic poets were writing for their own pleasure, in time, writers have understood that one can make a living out of his/her own literary productions.

In Victorian times, Thomas Hardy decided to give up his main job, as an architect and moved to the countryside in order to write prose and, later in life, poetry, selling his books and changing their content at the editor's will at times, in order to meet readers' expectations.

Probably one of the best businessmen of the Victorian era, a highly acclaimed writer of all times, Charles Dickens understood the importance of marketing his writings very well. There are numerous stories in his biography that show how his novels, which were first published in a famous newspaper of the time, *Morning Chronicle*, achieved success due to Dickens' understating of his readers. As each chapter was published in the newspaper, letters were arriving with different views of the readers related to the characters' evolution. Dickens read them and sometimes changed the story in order to comply with the will of the audience.

In modern times, however, the interest in the feedback from the audience reached a high peak, together with the confessional poets' interest in empathising with the reader.

Confessional poets (Robert Lowell, Theodore Roethke, John Berryman, Sylvia Plath or Anne Sexton) understood that in order to become successful writers and in order for their poetry to be acclaimed by the public, a strong link with the latter was needed.

What they found, in the middle of the 20th century, when the economy was booming and people were interested in

purchasing everything, was a highly valuable thing to sell – their lives.

According to most accounts of the period, mid-century American poets repudiated a petrified modernism administered in universities and revived the liberating, experimental energies of modernism, making poetry new again. When we put aside this cyclical model of literary change (and along with it, if only temporarily, period terms such as modern and postmodern), what comes into view is not a new style, mode or sensibility, but a distinctly new situation for poetry, a scene of literary production in which publication was linked to ‘networking’ and mentorship, reputations were made in public readings and poetry reviews, and income was derived from teaching, fellowship and prizes. This was by no means the only American poetry scene, circa 1950. But it was the dominant one in a literary field transformed by the historic expansion of the upper level of the American school system, the college and university, which (gradually in the 1930s and 1940s, rapidly in the post-war era) made new types of career available to poets. These new ways of making a living in poetry carried with them new ways of life for the American poet that resembled (but always only roughly) those of credentialed professionals, above all professors. This repositioning of poetry in the social order resulted in certain tension. It afforded poets new forms of privilege and opportunity while it isolated them as specialists, putting in crisis what modernism had already put in question – poetry’s traditional claim to speak for common feeling and experience. (Hammer, L. 2001, p. 61)

Confessional poetry means writing the deepest feelings of anger, desire, need to be loved, hate for parents, husband, wife and finishing your life with a cry for help and finding peace in death.

One of the most remarkable confessional poets who decided to make her life public was Sylvia Plath. When we say Sylvia Plath, we remember her tragic death, her marriage to one of the most well know British poets, Ted Hughes, her extraordinary autobiographical novel, *The Bell Jar*.

When Plath decided to live by her writing, after her marriage with Ted Hughes, her return to Europe and the birth of her first child, she understood how important it was to write something that was easy to sell.

As poetry is not always easy to vend, at a moment of her life Plath focused on writing short stories. What she actually did was to use the same rule as that for poetry writing, confessing, and using the first person in order to gain the interest of the audience.

She wrote about her interest in selling her work in her diary, published after her husband’s death. Here it is what she says: “I figured if I ever worked over a story & it didn’t sell, or wrote a piece for practise & couldn’t market it, something was wrong. I was gifted, talented - oh, all the editors said so - so why couldn’t I expect big returns for every minute of writing.” (Plath, S. 2000, p. 967)

At those times, just as nowadays, the magazines dedicate to women were selling well, opening a market for short-story writing. Plath, as a very stylish woman herself, interested in fashion, understands immediately that publishing in a glossy magazine that sells in a high number of copies can help her be noticed. In a letter to her mother, Plath says: “I am very encouraged by selling my first women’s magazine story; my second hasn’t sold yet, but the fiction editor of one of the two big women’s weeklies here wants to see me and talk over their requirements on the strength of it. So I shall push this. I’ll get

into the *Ladies Home Journal* yet!... (Plath, S. 1986, p. 431)

At the same time, Plath was struggling to publish her poems, which in fact she never gave up writing. She marks in her diary "My "Bull of Bendylaw" book of poems is much better arranged. Also, at this rate, with 'Arts In Society' accepting 'Sculptor', 'The Goring' (which I was beginning to think unsalable) and 'Aftermath', I have only 13 poems to publish before all 45 are in print, and these poems should not be too hard to sell." (Plath, S. 2000, p. 1138)

In 1955, Plath is more and more confident in her gaining money out of writing. She tells her mother in a letter "And I am going to SELL 'The Smoky Blue Piano' somewhere." (Plath, S. 1986, p. 157)

She is highly interested in publishing and selling her work. In another letter to her mother from 24 June 1960, Plath wrote: "Glad you liked the *New Yorker* poem. I should have another about women in a Spanish fishing village coming this summer. Now I need to write some more I can sell to them." (Plath, S. 1986, p. 387)

But Plath was not interested in marketing only her writings. At the beginning of the marriage with Hughes, she sent his poems to a poetry contest he won, gaining an important enough sum of money.

Plath's death brought more fame to her than her life. If during her short life, she died when she was 30, she succeeded in publishing only one volume of poetry and her novel, after her death, Hughes published the poems in different volumes, as well as her diary and a collection of letters, all having sold very well.

Hughes understood that their marriage was something people wanted to know about, so, towards the end of his life, he wrote a collection of poems dedicated to their marriage, called *Birthday Letters*.

Kaleidoscopically, reassembling particularly fraught moments in a long

public controversy, *Birthday Letters* responds to many audiences: to Plath and to a shifting public that fought battles in and over her name for more than thirty-five years.

Equivocal moves between revelation and concealment characterize this best-selling volume of poetry, which was always flanked by the words 'secret,' 'private,' and 'direct' in a media that tirelessly mediated between it and its audience.

*Birthday Letters*, too, can be read as mediation, a collection that couples the poetic voices of Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes. Less biography than biographical criticism, *Birthday Letters* entangles the woman and her work so that reading Plath is inextricably bound up with remembering her in *Birthday Letters*. (Stone, M. 2006, p. 261)

Plath and her husband understood that biography sells. It was told by critics that in fact, their writings were not entirely true. Well, I do not think that was important. Literature is fiction. Readers make their own choices when they buy books and interpret them. What matters is that Plath found a way to make the reader understand her message and empathize with it, realizing that he felt the same at times.

Being honest or miming honesty in order to be read is important when you are a writer. Finding a path that leads to the reader, when millions of books are being published proves that you are a writer that understands the needs of your consumer.

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