

LITERARY CRITICISM AND THE *APORIAS* OF READING LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT. *Literary Criticism and the Aporias of Reading Literature.* In this article, we will note the fact that literary criticism, whether in the Antiquity, the Middle Ages, or even in later, in romantic and modern streams, has the text as basis of judgment. This judgment develops with regard to the fictional world retrospectively, whether as evaluation or interpretation, subjectively or with tendencies towards objectivity, bearing impressionistic or scientific claims, and its value is communicating on behalf of the literary art. Literary criticism, which needs to be derived from readings of literature, is nowadays construed as the hegemony of theories that have sometimes harmed its humanity. When transformed into our critical discourse, these theories have often managed to kill the pleasure game that is reading literature. Part of our literary criticism still prioritises the tendency towards the phraseology and rhetoric of terminological formulations and arbitrary notions rather than the direct confrontation with the nature and naturalness of the literary text. Hence, Cratylus' ideality of motivation would suit our opinion on literature and our culture in general.

Keywords: *literary reading, terminology, Cratylism, aporia, literary criticism.*

REZUMAT. *Critica literară și aporiile lecturii literare.* În acest articol vom insista asupra faptului că literatura critică, fie cea din antichitate, din evul mediu, sau de mai târziu, din romantism sau modernism, are textul ca fundament de evaluare. Această evaluare se formează în jurul lumii ficționale retrospectiv, fie ca judecată sau interpretare, în mod subiectiv sau cu tendințe de obiectivitate, conținând afirmații științifice sau cu caracter de impresie, iar valoarea ei este aceea de comunicare în numele artei literare. Critica literară, care ar trebui să derive din lecturi literare, este azi concepută ca hegemonie a

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teoriilor care, uneori, i-au știrbit din umanism. Transformate în discurs critic, aceste teorii au sfârșit adesea prin a ucide plăcerea jocului de a citi literatură. O parte din critica literară contemporană acordă încă prioritate tendinței către frazeologia și retorica formulărilor terminologice și noțiunilor arbitrare, în detrimentul confruntării directe cu natura și naturalețea textului literar. De aceea, idealismul motivației așa cum apare în Cratylus s-ar potrivi opiniei noastre despre literatură și culturii noastre în general.²

Cuvinte cheie: *lectură literară, terminologie, cratylism, aporie, critică literară.*

1. Literary criticism and perplexity of notions

Since we, in the sphere of knowledge, acquaintance and doubts, are not greenhorn, then, on the basis of the readings of pleasure and of school, we are filled with notions, terms and nominations, which are now circling through individual *arche* - cognition, but, also live as a culture manifested in the environments, let us say, scientific and cultural, through which we participate. Therefore, we live in the *world of notions* and we often measure the world with them.

Nevertheless, this necessarily carries with it the dangers of solidification, drought and manipulation, when the notions claim to replace the humanity of the discourse of human sciences in general, and in this path the discourse of literary criticism as one of the areas where the readings and the gathered knowledge besides the unsurpassed subject of the literary critic author coexist.

Consequently, like many other people dealing with this cognitive domain, we may solicit: *beware the notions*. However, *being aware of the notions* does not necessarily mean that they should be considered invalid and their disappearance should be required from the systematic of literary analysis on the whole, considering such a step to be invalid and even impossible. Only, we adapt the Barthes proposition of seeking *the text of pleasure which is liked to a comfortable practice of reading* (Barthes 1998: 14). But, let us start from the very term *criticism* in the basic terms used as a literary criticism.

Getting acquainted through time, the word *criticism* derives from the ancient Greek word *krites*, walking through other cultures and words, such as Latin *criticus*, further to French *critique* and the Anglo-Saxon *criticism*, to mark a *meta-process* that takes into account what we are nominally taught to qualify as a *judgment* (Habib 2003: 9).

² The abstract has been translated into Romanian by Ioana-Gabriela Nan.

Nevertheless, to *judge*, whether a phenomenon, an action, a rhetorical-ideological text, then a literary text or even other possible admissions and rejections, means accepting the phenomenon of a prior essence, that is, of something that leads, and why not say that lives before the probable process of judgment, whether as meditation, or as a medium of speech or writing. And what leads is the world, humanity, hence a sign or a trace, whether conceptualized or real.

Thus, *judgment* is always associated with the physics and metaphysics of the presence.

Hence, if we extend the term *criticism* we know it as *poetics* and we can say that even Aristotle at his organon *Poetics* enters in the realm of *retrospective judgment*, namely the literary world or even the ancient humanity of Greece, when it is already known that Aristotle's analysis of form and mass is based on the naturalness of prior art by observing it in its gnoseological well-being, i.e. in the elemental forms of their birth, especially applicable in Dionysus tradition as a Homeric narrative epic poetry. For the reason that no one can remove the term or vague notion of *mimesis* from the artistic world of ancient tragedy, as we can say that the art itself labeled as *mimesis* reminds us the awareness of the rich Dionysian world. Nevertheless, the question we can place here is the following: What do we need the notion of *mimesis* (Aristotle 1995: 30) if this powerful world of ancient Greek artistic outbreak, would not be known to the extent possible. We would remain in a notionally vague game, which would not carry any more meaning than a *plus sign* in the already traditional nomination index.

Walking through time, the same can be said of Horace's already reputed *dulce et utile* notion, (Horace 1926: 442-443) which as such came from a valid written communication for the fellow writers, pretender to write or to take the craft of writing in the field of art of letters.

If, we traditionally have constantly chewed the two sides of the notion, *dulce et utile*, then their orientation is known to lead to the interior or the world of art, so that art possesses the pleasure and usefulness, a tendency of merging the opposites of Aristotle and Plato, therefore, there is a tendency of philosophical harmonization towards a specific world that we know as art with letters and syllables. Yet, we will never have the opportunity to use this term or give this epitome to something, if it does not exist as *idiosyncratic* world beforehand.

To describe something, in the field of art, as a *dulce et utile*, means to enter into the world of a specific artistic humanity ever-present, accordingly, to enter into the world of a sign and why not even of an icon. On this logic, we believe that Horace has also judged, when he began artistic communication with his epistles, always having the awareness of the preexisting existence of ancient Greek artistic genres carried on Roman soil; moreover, by looking at those works of divine attributes as well as divinely inspired and knowledgeable poet.

Observing on evolutionary curve through time, we can also say that literary criticism has not disappeared during the Middle Ages. The fate of Greek works and authors would largely depend on the imitations of Latin authors who managed to preserve the basic elements of classical poetics, the concept of *mimesis*, and the three basic literary genres, even though the early Middle Ages did not know the artistic world of Homer and the theoretical-critical insights of Aristotle. We should hereby emphasize that, during this period, the *literary commentary*, mainly of theological and Biblical texts, was significantly developed, as an activity that was associated with accommodation of pagan texts in the doctrine, which saw the text as it was preserved and commented it on the principles of doctrinal hegemony, where through a critical filter was meant its publication as well.

It should also be emphasized that the medieval Latinity school, which was organized in *seven arts* (craftsmanship), practiced its opinion on literature within the frames of the third art, since *rhetoric was the general and the only theory of literature* (Curtius 1971: 76).

This means that, in terms of notions, the harmony of the third element of Latin classical rhetoric was required, i.e. of *elocutio-s* (expression), to make the text organized in the system of word figures, a system that would become a school of later modern literary criticism and stylistic studies. Nonetheless, the source of notions was always the text and in this path the awareness of its valid organization.

Also, the religious fathers, St. Jerome and St. Augustine were also strong on this source; the first one commented on the holy scripture on the principles of humanity, and sought to unity of the Jewish and Greek traditions in order to link the times, while the second on these texts built powerful doctrinal and personal interpretations, as in terms of later outbreaks can be described as the *authors of Christian discourse*.

Still, it can be said that even in the historical continuity of the Renaissance and later, the notion of criticism, despite the various outbreaks in the literature and cultures, which had typical and atypical literary developments, meant either *commentary*, *interpretation (hermeneutics)* or *evaluation* of the fictional and doctrinal text, putting into crisis the function of literary criticism itself in its own connection with the textology.

Strong consolidators of literary criticism, in the framework of Western culture and literature, have consistently debated the very nature of literary criticism, trying to give to the critical notion its function as well. According to a general belief, even nowadays, we can say that the inevitable critical conclusion itself is a controversial concept. This controversy or ambiguity has at least a two-hundred-year history, clashing in different literary and cultural contexts, always on the principle of connecting literary criticism to the literary text itself and to the author who writes it.

This controversy is strongly linked to the very nature of literary criticism by maneuvering in its *aporia* of whether *subjective criticism*, hence relative should be described, or whether it should persistently require *objectivity* and fulfill scientific models, thus moving on the path of criticism as a judgment, which from Antiquity reaches to the 18th century, just to be connected with other social, ideological orientations and literary contexts; the dichotomy that has come and has strongly burst especially in the 60s of the last century and continuing even today.

However, what should be emphasized is the belief that the game with the notions and the scope of their validity itself has had the basic source in the literary texts of different forms, always leaving the terminology as a *posteriori* thought towards opinion crises of the critical author in the human world stratified through literary texts.

2. The usefulness of literary criticism

The fundamental purpose or usefulness of literary criticism is the interpretation of literature with aim to communicate more strongly with the potential reader, either as a call for reading, or an orientation for a possible reading prism.

In this process, criticism can be the reading of the work or the works, where we necessarily have to deal with description, analysis, evaluation, discussion, theory, aesthetic or to say, with the thing that has previously been defined as poetics and rhetoric.

This phenomenology pushes us to accept the Anglo-American concept, where the term "criticism" implies all knowledge of literature, more specifically literary text.

From this process of enlargement, fragmentation, and escape from criticism as *literary text judgment*, we have already become accustomed to the epithets of criticism as *romantic*, *formalist*, *psycho-analytical*, *soc-realistic*, *structuralist*, *post-structuralist criticism*, that is, with its constant "ideology", at least as an epithet, and with literary critic as a moralizer of his literary and why not political beliefs.

Let us give an arbitrary view of these differentiations of approaches to literature, always being wary of a modern interdisciplinarity of communication of the scientific and human knowledge field in general, communication that increased the relation of the circles and cultural contexts of their peoples and their national literature.

In his book *The Mirror and the Lamp*, M. H. Abrams, known as a traditional critic of romantic poetry, emphasized that traditional criticism regarding literary

work concentrated on the study of the universe, work, author and audience (Abrams 1971: 6). Accordingly, criticism investigated the relationship between literature and the general, the work as *mimetics*, then the author as its creator and its moral influence on the audience. This tendency, say the neo-Aristotelian, continued until the eighteenth century, after which criticism began to consider the *expressiveness* of the artist's feelings in the literary work. Whereas, literary criticism of the twentieth century developed in addition to the philosophical, scientific and ideological outbursts of the time.

A *literary work* was set in the core focus, where it was considered self-sufficient for formalists who did not deal with anything beyond the literary text, seeking what is known as *literality*. This form of criticism also had as its counterparts the American formalist criticism, or as it is known by the term "new criticism" which by maintaining the concept of text analysis also launched the term "close reading".

Structural criticism, however, required deeper structures in literary texts, through which surfaced various *codes* and *discourses*, where the text communicated with other areas of human knowledge, aided by linguistic and anthropological knowledge, to see in more intricately way the world of communication with other fields, rather than the very meaning of the literary text.

This phenomenon continued what is known as post-structuralism, when the derridean notion of *deconstruction*, or, say, of ambiguity and suspicion in *logocentrism*, was significantly strengthened to revive the philosophy of opposites.

In a parallel and often in a kind of amalgam we also have *psychoanalytic* criticism, which tends to expand the meaning of the text by strongly linking it to the author's *psyche*, seeing the text always as the product of the inner psychic strata of the one who wrote it.

While *sociological* or *soc-realistic* criticism, in the foreground has the ideological force and its fulfillment in the literary text, seeing the later, as an ideological and political *praxis*, just to emerge as the most atypical force in relation to self-essence of literary criticism and literature itself.

However, the eruption of this knowledge, which as a source has different cultural circles, as much it can influence in the strengthening of an ontology of criticism, that is, the opinion of the literature phenomenon, a field in which the valid notions of literary criticism arise, that much they can remove humanity and fiction in literature, the categories that must always be linked in the process of interpretation, that is, of literary criticism.

Since, frequently, by holding a substantial dose of ideology and often living as opposites of one another, these critical models by becoming slave of methods are removed from the "innocent" reading of literature, transforming the literary object into the medium of the various philosophical, theoretical and

ideological attributes, thus by transforming the literary text into the pretext of knowledge collisions, not in the artist's and critic's heartland, to be identified in the humanity of human art.

However, all these critical models, as essential motivating force have the literary text, though often the text has remained "stranger in its home". Thus, though the scholarly knowledge of a good critic is necessary, the usefulness of literary criticism would be strengthened, if it would firmly return to the *interpretation*, which is based on the literary work and other models such as *bricolage* (Genette 1984: 40).

Because the constant search for the method or methods, having literature as a pretext, does not validate communication with literary art, but by all means, with different colorings, conclusion will be ideological.

Therefore, it is also justifiable the opinion or even the fervor of the well-known American critic, Harold Bloom, who in a conversation on literary criticism among others emphasized:

My friend Paul de Man with whom, as I say, I used to argue endlessly, would tell me that after a lifetime of searching, he had found the method, the "Truth," I would say, "No, dear Paul, there is no Truth. There is only the Self." What theory did the great critics have? Critics like Dr. Samuel Johnson or William Hazlitt? Those who adopt a theory are simply imitating somebody else. I believe firmly that, in the end, all useful criticism is based upon experience. An experience of teaching, an experience of reading, one's experience of writing—and most of all, one's experience of living. Just as wisdom, in the end, is purely personal. There can be no method except the Self (Rothenber 2003).

3. Direction of the criticism towards literature

In our little more than a century old tradition, we can say that with few exceptions, Albanian criticism has more taken the experiences of the great theories and philosophies of the century and adjoined them in the literature study, rather than creating an inherent philosophical, theoretical and terminological apparatus for studying our literary corpus.

Great methods, which were applied in literature and in large national cultures, arrived sometimes along with, sometimes with delay, to the discourse of our literary criticism.

However, forgetting for a moment the immense value of this cultural exchange of methods, which without any doubt has aroused the critical and literary culture of us, we can also note the fact how the discourse, which as a source has had other cultural beginnings, has sometimes lightly pinched, respectfully affected Albanian literature.

After the Second World War, in the discourse of literary criticism in Kosovo, we note two fundamental provenances. Some literary critics accepted the methodological “influenza” of Russian *socialist realism* and demanded literature to be subject to the ideological scheme of creation, while others fled farther and brought the methods of European criticism, mostly alive and active in the great European cultural centers.

The first line of critics demanded the engagement of art, whereas the second one, the opening to the Western artistic world. While the second line of critics, by foreign terminology, which had the ideological and political world for resourcefulness, during its application educated in the new utopian spirit, the second line, took the terminology of the great European knowledge, which they applied in the study of Albanian literature, but through it, they appreciated the literature that kept the connection to the tradition.

Although, in both cases, the applied apparatus sometimes turns out to be *arbitrary*, at least as a discourse, since as such it has as a source other literatures that did not correspond to the evolution of our literature. The first line of critics, even when dealing with literary tradition, they discussed it with sociological discourse and often exclusionary. While the second line of critics, being more cognizant of literature as a *differentia specifica* (Rugova 1987: 9-35) even though they took the apparatus, did not ideologize their discourse and approach to the uniqueness of literature.

If we want to carefully investigate the critical writings of these two ranks of literary thinkers, especially those of the early 60's and 70's in Kosovo, we will notice that terminological and even discourse critical clashes are implemented during the reviews that were made to the works of tradition, periodizations, even the special volumes of literary works, where one party, through an apparatus devalues, while the other approves and values.

Although, now the times, ethics and politics have changed, this collusion, however latently, still exists and can be studied even in our school of thought for the literary art.

By never claiming this phenomenon as bad, in terms of literary debate, but with the condition of avoiding the elimination, we can say that this terminological clash, which has already touched new generation of creators, now as classic that has to be read, has begun to make the discourse of literary critique *self-sufficient*, even discarded, where it almost creates the impression that it is missing the object of study, moreover the literature works are postponed toward extra contextual *biografemes* and arbitrary denials.

Already, the search for the method or attempt to harmonize methods in literary criticism has doubled the terminology scheme, where a great wave of notions has flooded the discourse of criticism, which even the author of the criticism does not know the cultural and literary roots of, or where they derive from.

If, we speak of great authors of world criticism, who, unless they are misused are an extraordinary reference, their disseminated terminology in our critical discourse would appear more arbitrary.

It is a mixture, let us say, the terminology of Saussure's *semiotics* with the *transtextuality* of Genette, then Bakhtin's *dialogic* and *heteroglossia* with the Roland Barth's *codes* and *lexemes*, the Frye's *archetypes*, to continue with Derrida's *difference* and *deconstruction* etc., almost all of them not sufficiently understood, to construct a critical discourse that often flees to the edges from the chosen object for analysis, which should be the literature itself or the phenomenon of the literature.

Knowing this phenomenon, the romanian academician Eugen Simion observed that literature has entered a truly deep crisis and lived for decades in a system that has been subordinate to politics. He, debating with Todorov argues that *after the explosion of methods, it is not the case to return literary criticism to biographical criticism and impressionistic practices, although there is no shame in admitting that criticism has its own muse, its moment of grace and need for imagination, as the early twentieth century Impressionists used to believe. But it needs something else, too: a new synthesis in the critical approach, a summary of findings brought about by structuralism and other modern methods (psychoanalysis, archetypal criticism, thematic criticism etc.) and their association with creative critical approaches (analysis of meanings, context analysis), so that the literary work might be able to reveal its depths, myths, fundamental issues and its power of seduction* (Simion 2010: 125-137).

The question that can be asked here is as follows: Is the criticisms written as evaluation, judgment, interpretation for literature, literary writing, or the later one serves solely as a pretext for the controversial scientist launch of incompatible notions and terminology, which are amputated by other study, literary and cultural circles?

We can say that if the first one is missing, then the second "philosophy" of scripture makes critical discourse ugly to its outmost and makes the criticism unreadable by the literature lovers, who accepts the game of thought for the literary work or the literary phenomenon but does not accept the published intellectual and terminological claim of the literary critic. Since, literary critic should no longer play the role of the author against whom we must fear and have admiration, but of an aesthetic mediator of generating *infinite meanings* that as a source always have literary art itself.

Thus, not to distress you, but more to make an observation, we can say that literary criticism is "saturated" by the *aporia of notions*.

4. Literary criticism and literary text

As we stated that in Albanian literary criticism we are already notice the *aporia of notions*, then it is worthwhile to discuss the possibilities of valid paths to mitigate this aporias. The first question that arises in this area is about the first essential element of literary criticism: the issue of reading literary text. How much is the literary corpus read, how is it read and what are the meanings and misunderstandings in this intricated reading process?

Accepting the personal aesthetics of reading to the intrinsic nature of literary works, we think that the critic's validity is strengthened more when his attempt is first crowned with the systematic reading of the literary corpus. Based on what can be noticed, but always bearing the risk of aberration, it can be said that there are few literary critics in us that have read the literary corpus, to say in the supposed entirety of literary performances. This seems to have come as a result of different constraints, whether personal, whether of continual lack of a more opened cultural inter-communication.

We are of the opinion that, literary critic, as a lover of literary expression, is the one who has the yearning of the systematic and substantial reader of works to build the appearance of literature from which may also derive the choices and vocational interpretations in accordance with the differentiating parts of the literary texts.

This spirit would bring about a more *practical* criticism, in the sense of the natural connection with the literary text, rather than the tendency for arbitrariness of cognitive intentions, which would arouse the literary text at any real time of its observation and would make it acceptable for reading without any prejudice.

The terminology gained by European and wider circles would be better stabilized and would be in the function of reading, where would not retain the throne of a judge of freedom of reading and interpretation.

Systematic reading would also revive an adequate terminology, closely related to the literary text and its more subordinate sources. Ultimately, good thinkers in a national culture create their own terminology.

The most acclaimed European and world critics did not act otherwise, some of which were mentioned above in this work. We would not lend the notions of Western criticism, but not to derive from the systematic interpretation of their literatures we have examples of this valid work everywhere. Since, through systematic reading and a practical criticism on literary texts always in vision, two fundamental effects are achieved: the national literature is interpreted and inspired, and if its observations are valid, itself jointly with the apparatus that emanates from the analysis, starts its own universal life.

To borrow some remarks from Antiquity we may rely on Plato's dialogue, *Cratylus*. In this dialogue, ancient philosopher discusses the *motivation* or the *conventionality* of language. Cratylus, defending the thesis that language lives in its own motivation world, is opposed to the convention. He avoids the debate to leave the issue pending, which Socrates and Hermogenes perseveringly argue. If at the beginning of the dialogue, Socrates, which is the second character or *alter ego* of Plato, defends Cratylus' side, in the forthcoming lines of the dialogue, the primate is taken by Hermogenes, so it advocates that, in the presence of language as communication we cannot avoid the convention. However, if the debate about names, i.e. language, is shifted to literary grounds or expressions, then all the literature has an ideal: the image, eponymy (nickname), motivation, and the human spirit, that is inclined to escape the convention, which narrows and schematizes. Therefore, if literature has motivation as ideal, then why literary criticism, which is its undivided daughter, not to have as the basic ideal on form of *cratyllic philosophy*.

Conclusion

Within this work we noticed and argued that the literary criticism, whether in the Antiquity, the Middle Ages, or even in later, romantic and modern streams, has the text as basis of its judgment and as such it is retrospectively develops with the fictional world, whether as a judgment, evaluation, interpretation, whether subjective or with tendencies of objectivity, whether impressionist or scientist claims, and that its value is communication for literary art. That literary criticism derives from reading literature and that overbuild up theories sometimes have harmed its humanity, to stand on this reading as a goblin that hinders its free life and opinion about it. That these theories, when transfigured into critical discourse, have often been instrumented to slay the pleasing game of loving literary reading or pleasure of the text. This overflow of theories and literary criticism notions caused that a part of our criticism evaluation still prioritizes the tendency of the phraseology of rhetoric of terminological formulations rather than direct confrontation with the nature and naturalness of the literary text. Hence, a Cratylus ideality would suit our opinion on literature and our culture in general, to seek motivation, pleasure and autonomous morality and belief in literature.

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