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## CONTROVERSIES IN APPROACHES TO LITERARY TEXT ANALYSIS

The development of modern literary criticism has been influenced by numerous humanitarian theories, embracing the ideas in the spheres of philosophy, linguistics and communicative studies. The tendency towards interdisciplinary accumulation of knowledge has triggered the appearance of new schools and directions of literary analysis. The problem is that the now-existing diversity of

literary schools is not based on systematic or chronological premises, but relies on a disorganized series of scientific insights. Imaginatively, there is no agreement between scholars and critics who either celebrate the globalist approach and literary experimentation or criticize the chaos of Western literary studies for “a clear, deliberate break from historical tradition, denial of the merits of other literary schools, swaying from one extreme to another, neglect of the practice of literature and dogmatism” [1].

The advocates of the so-called “classicist” approach to literary studies resist the influence of Western extra-literary theories and claim that the separation the written text from the author’s intention and historical tradition weakens creative literary potential and leads to the death of literary theory as a sphere of knowledge. The Chinese scholars Chzhan and Lyu introduce the concept of *forced interpretation* to describe methodology of new literary criticism, based on “a violent separation from the text, thereby leveling, and sometimes simply destroying, literary specificity” [2, p. 139]. They claim that modern literary theories are excessively biased and scientifically irrelevant, because instead of objective literary analysis, interpreters bring the study to conclusions that are aimed at justifying their subjective judgments.

Thus, classicists demonstrate extremely skeptical attitude to the idea of deconstructive analysis that opens doors to feminist, LGBT or postcolonial criticism of classical literature. As an example of forced interpretation, the scholars mention an environmental deconstruction of Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Fall of the House of Usher”, which transforms (deconstructs) a classical horror story into ecological discourse where an old house becomes a metaphor of entropy and the main hero’s life is an embodiment of the gradual cooling of the planet [3]. The question arises about the boundaries of critical reorganization of the author’s text and messages. Where is the balance between interpreting literature as a form of art and self-reflection through literature?

The deconstruction of classical literature provides new perspectives and outlooks of characters, themes and settings, known to everyone, and those fresh angles may seem shocking, confusing and bewildering. F. Scott Fitzgerald’s “The Great Gatsby” is viewed as queer discourse with Nick Carraway as a hidden gay character. W. Shakespeare’s “Hamlet” is analyzed as feminist discourse with emphasis on female characters, when Ophelia is represented as the main character of the story. While no one can deny that these conclusions are very interesting and refreshing, is it still literary analysis of a well-known text or is it a completely new text that represents the reader’s self-cognition inspired by literature?

The opponents of traditional criticism disagree and invite the world’s literary community to pursue an attitude that the German critic Heinrich Detering has called “cheerful pluralism” [4, p. 12]. At the background of literary diversity both readers and critics are encouraged to “play with different approaches, to test how far they can take us, to short-circuit texts and theories”. As T. A. Shmitz puts it, “If I had to choose between daring novel readings at the risk of proposing wrong interpretations on the one hand and forever repeating the same old truths on the other, I would not hesitate to pick the former” [4, p. 4].

There is an impression that progressive literary scholars got carried away by the experimental freedom modern humanitarian knowledge can provide and forgot about the responsibility their profession imposes on them. This is exactly what happens to a teenager when they are left home alone facing an endless torrent of enjoyable possibilities and unlimited access to the places where they weren't allowed before. Having been strictly limited by literary canons and dogmas for centuries, literary criticism is breaking bad now. But usually this is a necessary condition of future maturity, which leads to sober awareness and rethinking of world outlook. What we are trying to say by this metaphor is that both sides have to reconsider their views and approaches for the benefit of healthy literary criticism as humanitarian knowledge.

What both the advocates of modern literary criticism and their opponents have to think about is the answer to a very simple question: why do people read literature? What makes a person who is busy with work and household errands forget about everything and find extra time for reading a newly published love story or rereading a favourite novel or poem, even though they know it almost by heart? Meanwhile, every person who enjoys reading may notice that each time they reread a familiar book, they notice new details and discover new aspects they didn't pay attention before. For example, Leo Tolstoy's "Anna Karenina" may produce a completely different impression if one reads it for the tenth or twentieth time. The literary text remains the same, but as people grow up and get more life experience their attitude to Anna Karenina changes from compassion and pity to rejection and hostility. At the same time, the book turns out to be not a source of knowledge about the world, but a source of self-knowledge. Readers learn a lot not so much about the historical context of Tolstoy's times, but about themselves and their inner world while they are working out attitudes to different characters.

So, multiple individual interpretations based on individual perception accompanied by further contemplations have always been the reader's privilege. Traditional literary analysis has never denied the reader's right to discover new unrevealed aspects of a literary text. What is uncomfortable about traditional literary criticism is that it has always positioned itself snobbishly as the objective ultimate truth about literature, which has to be taken for granted.

However, the legacy of Soviet literary criticism has taught us that even traditional literary criticism prioritizes not objectiveness in its metaphysical presence, but the purpose of promoting the existing ideology by explaining it to the average readers how to interpret classical literature from the point of view of the ideological paradigm. For example, Soviet literary criticism develops a very positive attitude to Evgeny Bazarov, a literary character from I. Tourgenyev's "Fathers and Sons": "Evgeny Bazarov embodies the most characteristic features of a fighter for the enlightenment of the people, for the liberation of science from moldy traditions" [5, p.117]. Though, let's admit it, Bazarov seems to be a very controversial character in Russian literature. He demonstrates a very disrespectful attitude to his parents, behaves in a very arrogant and unpleasant manner with his friend Kirsanov and doesn't produce an impression of a fighter, rather of a narrow-

mindful upstart and show-off without respect for in-depth education and traditions. Soviet literary criticism in its defiance of capitalist philosophical tendencies was employing the method of deconstruction in literary analysis before Western humanitarian thought came up with a name for these practices.

Those people who once were reading classical Russian literature through the prism of Soviet ideals can hardly see the difference between the feminist deconstructive reading of Shakespeare's "Hamlet" and the communist pathos, which they had to discover forcefully in Bazarov's nihilistic image under the influence of the official literary theory.

So, on the one hand, professional traditional criticism as something totally objective is like an ideal reader with ideal insomnia, namely, it just doesn't exist. H. G. Gadamer, a philosopher who developed the concept of philosophical hermeneutics, pointed out that prejudice is an obligatory element of our understanding [6, p. 10]. Indeed, our pre-judgments of something we wish to understand are unavoidable. According to hermeneutical studies, absolute objective understanding is impossible, as well as complete reconstruction of a literary text is impossible. On the other hand, in our appreciation of formal literary elements we can achieve the so-called recontextualization, which helps pay attention to the aspects that were ignored before.

Unfortunately, there is no clear understanding about whether literary studies are in their heyday, enjoying the achievements of philosophical and scientific thought to the fullest, or moving slowly to their crisis and total loss of unified fundamental methodology that defines a sphere of knowledge. However, one thing is obvious: there is a certain need for thorough reflection of modern tendencies in literary criticism, consideration of the existing controversies and a more generalized and systematic view of the diverse literary theories.

In his account for the methodology of literary criticism, R. Akhmetov singles out the following approaches to literary text analysis: 1) text-oriented approach, 2) author-oriented approach, 3) reader-oriented approach and 4) context-oriented approach [7, p. 31].

The text-oriented approach is concerned with the formal elements of literary texts, their structure, language and style. Such literary theories as New Criticism, Formalism and Structuralism seem to comply with the idea of interpretation of meaning which is created and contained in the text itself. The Formalist notion of literariness was expressed by the adage "to make the stones stonier", which explains their basic concept of "defamiliarization" [7, p. 9]. Paying attention to the language itself, but not to the context or the author's personality, the reader can take a fresh look at everyday routine and familiar things. Structuralism as an extension of Formalism is rooted in the ideas of the Swiss linguist, Ferdinand de Saussure who regarded written language as a symbolic representation of speech (*parole*), which, in its turn is a symbolic representation of metaphysical presence, thus written texts can be decoded to get to implied messages. New Criticism "viewed the work of literature as an aesthetic object independent of historical context and as a unified whole that reflected the unified sensibility of the artist" [7,

p. 10]. The similarity between these theories is obvious: all of them are more interested in text itself either as a specific code, or an aesthetic object that fulfills a poetic defamiliarizing function. The legacy of these theories can be found at modern literature classes, where written literary texts remain the primary objects of literary analysis with focused attention on the formal structures and stylistic devices.

The author-oriented approach is based on establishing connections between written texts and the biography of the author, the circumstances of the author's life that contributed to certain experiences and thoughts expressed in the text. This idea is promoted in traditional literary criticism interested mostly in literary dogmas and canons.

The context-oriented approach is represented by the literary schools of New Historicism and Cultural Materialism that are based on historical reading of literary texts and the rejection of Formalist approach. As R. Akhmetov points out, "texts are examined with an eye for how they reveal the economic and social realities, especially as they produce ideology and represent power or subversion" [7, p. 31].

The reader-oriented approach denies the importance of decoding the messages implied by the author and emphasizes the role of the reader as a creator of meaning. Under the umbrella of this approach such literary schools as poststructuralism, reader-response theory, gender and cultural studies as well as queer and postcolonial criticism can be found. The above-mentioned theories view reading either as a process of communication with the author or as a process of creating new meanings through the deconstruction of literary texts. Thus, deconstruction as a semiotic theory and as a method, suggested by a French philosopher J. Derrida became one of the main theoretical foundations for the explanation of multiple interpretations and endless number of meanings of the same text.

We believe that classification of literary approaches can be based not only on the objects under analysis, but revolved around the aims the reader sets before reading: either our aim is to get as closer to the author's intentions and messages as possible or to provide a new fresh perspective on a literary work through our own perspective. The readers are looking for either better understanding of what the author actually implied, or their own response provoked by the text.

Thus, we believe we can single out three main approaches to reading and analyzing literary texts depending on readers' ambitions to dig out for the author's messages:

- 1) logocentric (reconstructive),
- 2) deconstructive (self-reflective),
- 3) communicative (dialogical).

The *logocentric* approach is based on the idea of philosophical logocentrism which is rooted in the Aristotelian understanding of written texts as symbols of spoken speech, while spoken speech symbolizes *logos* (the meaning which exists as a part of metaphysical presence) [8, p. 34]. The far-reaching consequence of this

philosophical statement that treats written text as an underdog is the absolute and unquestioned “tyranny” of the author and the view of reading only as doubling of the text with the aim of objective reconstruction of the original thoughts and ideas implied by the author.

Alternatively, the *deconstructive* approach is based on J. Derrida’s idea of reading as a productive process in which the reader creates new meanings that are out of the author’s control. Deconstructive reading opens new horizons for both writers and readers, but blurs the boundaries between written text under analysis and the reader’s discourse as literary response.

The *communicative* approach represents reading as an interactive process and echoes with the traditions of Russian Formalism, R. Jakobson’s model of communication and M. M. Bakhtin’s concept of dialogism, which, as applied to literary texts, denotes that the understanding of meaning evolves out of interaction among the author, the text and the reader. The process of reading as a process of communication between the author and the reader seems to be a sensible balance between the two extremes of traditional and modern approaches to literary analysis, which can benefit from the opportunities of both directions. On the one hand, the communicative approach provides an opportunity to pay closer attention to the text, its language, style and structure, attempting to understand messages implied by the author. On the other hand, the reader feels free to come up with his or her own interpretations and meanings through the perspectives of contemporary social and cultural contexts.

To sum it up, literary analysis should be tackled as a sensible and justified balance of modernity and tradition. Instead of encouraging competition between the past and the present, we need to establish a reasonable consensus and to benefit from all the strategies and methods available to us to emphasize the significance of literature as a source of knowledge, self-discovery and emotional contemplation.

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