

The Theoretical and Methodological Foundations Of Literary Criticism And Its Role In The Contemporary Literary Process

Tulishova Gulzina Ravshanovna

Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Philological Sciences, Acting Associate Professor at Jizzakh State Pedagogical University, Uzbekistan

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Abstract: This article examines the theoretical and methodological foundations of literary criticism and determines its role in the contemporary literary process. Literary criticism is considered not only as a form of evaluation of literary works, but also as an important component of literary studies, aesthetic thinking, and cultural communication. The relevance of the topic is explained by the fact that in the modern literary environment, where artistic texts, digital platforms, reader reception, and cultural values interact dynamically, literary criticism performs analytical, interpretive, evaluative, educational, and communicative functions. The aim of the study is to analyze the scientific-theoretical bases of literary criticism, to reveal its methodological principles, and to clarify its significance in the formation of literary taste and the development of the literary process. The research uses historical-literary, comparative-typological, hermeneutic, structural, and analytical methods. The article substantiates that literary criticism is based on such theoretical categories as artistic value, aesthetic criterion, genre, style, authorial position, reader reception, and socio-cultural context. The results show that contemporary literary criticism has expanded its traditional functions and now operates at the intersection of academic literary studies, journalism, cultural studies, and digital communication. The article concludes that literary criticism plays an essential role in identifying artistic tendencies, interpreting literary works, forming public literary consciousness, and ensuring the continuity between literary tradition and innovation.

Keywords: Literary criticism, literary process, methodology, aesthetic analysis, interpretation, evaluation, literary studies, contemporary literature, critical thinking, reader reception.

Introduction: Literary criticism occupies a special place in the system of literary studies because it directly connects literary theory, literary history, artistic practice, and the reader's perception of literature. It is impossible to imagine the development of any national literature without critical thought. Literary criticism observes, analyzes, evaluates, interprets, and directs the literary process. It helps society understand the artistic value of literary works and at the same time contributes to the formation of aesthetic taste, cultural consciousness, and intellectual dialogue.

The contemporary literary process is characterized by diversity of forms, plurality of artistic methods, expansion of digital communication, and active

participation of readers in literary discussions. In such conditions, the role of literary criticism becomes even more significant. If in earlier periods literary criticism mainly functioned through newspapers, journals, academic publications, and literary meetings, today it also develops through internet platforms, electronic journals, blogs, social networks, and online literary communities. This transformation requires a new understanding of the theoretical and methodological foundations of literary criticism.

The theoretical basis of literary criticism is connected with the general laws of literature, the nature of artistic creativity, the relationship between form and content, the problem of artistic value, and the interaction

between literature and society. Literary criticism cannot be limited to subjective impression or simple praise and blame. It must rely on scientific criteria, aesthetic principles, historical context, and methodological consistency. A critic should understand not only the content of a literary work, but also its artistic structure, genre nature, language, imagery, ideological direction, and place in the literary process.

The methodological foundations of literary criticism include different approaches to the analysis and interpretation of literary texts. Historical-literary analysis allows the critic to examine a work in connection with the period in which it was created. Comparative analysis reveals similarities and differences between authors, works, genres, and national literatures. Hermeneutic interpretation helps to understand the deep meanings of the text. Structural analysis studies the internal organization of the literary work. Sociological and cultural approaches reveal the connection between literature and social life. Therefore, literary criticism is a complex intellectual activity that combines scientific objectivity, aesthetic sensitivity, and analytical thinking.

The aim of this article is to study the theoretical and methodological foundations of literary criticism and to determine its role in the contemporary literary process. To achieve this aim, the article analyzes the essence of literary criticism, its methodological principles, its functions in the literary process, and its contemporary development tendencies.

The research is based on a qualitative approach, since the object of study is literary criticism as a theoretical, methodological, and cultural phenomenon. The main methods used in the article are historical-literary analysis, comparative-typological analysis, hermeneutic interpretation, structural analysis, and analytical generalization. The historical-literary method makes it possible to consider literary criticism in connection with the development of literary thought and the changing needs of the literary process. The comparative-typological method helps to identify common and specific features of different critical approaches. Hermeneutic interpretation is used to understand the meaning-making function of criticism and its role in explaining literary texts. Structural analysis is applied to examine the internal principles of critical evaluation, such as content, form, genre, style,

and artistic integrity. Analytical generalization allows the study to draw conclusions about the contemporary importance of literary criticism.

The methodological basis of the study is formed by the works of scholars who studied literary theory, poetics, criticism, interpretation, and the social nature of literature. The article relies on the idea that literary criticism is a mediating sphere between the literary text, the author, the reader, and society. This approach makes it possible to examine literary criticism not only as an academic activity, but also as a practical and cultural form of participation in the literary process.

Literary criticism may be defined as a form of literary and aesthetic activity aimed at analyzing, interpreting, and evaluating literary works and literary phenomena. Its theoretical foundation is based on the understanding that literature is not merely a reflection of reality, but a specific form of artistic cognition. A literary work creates an aesthetic model of life through images, plot, composition, language, rhythm, conflict, and character. Literary criticism reveals how these artistic elements function and what meaning they produce.

One of the most important theoretical categories of literary criticism is artistic value. The critic evaluates a work not only according to its theme or ideological direction, but also according to its artistic quality. Artistic value is determined by the unity of content and form, originality of imagery, depth of thought, emotional impact, linguistic expressiveness, and the ability of the work to reflect human experience in a meaningful way. A literary work may address an important social issue, but if it lacks artistic integrity, it cannot be considered a fully successful artistic phenomenon. Therefore, criticism must combine ideological, aesthetic, and structural analysis.

Another important theoretical basis of literary criticism is the concept of genre. Each literary genre has its own internal laws, compositional principles, expressive possibilities, and reader expectations. The analysis of a poem, a novel, a short story, a drama, or an essay requires different critical criteria. For example, in the analysis of a lyric poem, attention is paid to lyrical emotion, rhythm, imagery, metaphor, and the inner world of the lyrical subject. In the analysis of a novel, plot structure, character development, narrative

perspective, social background, and psychological depth become important. Thus, genre awareness is one of the methodological conditions of objective literary criticism.

Style is also a central category in literary criticism. The style of a writer reflects the individual manner of artistic thinking, the choice of language, the system of images, syntactic structure, tone, rhythm, and narrative technique. Through stylistic analysis, the critic identifies the uniqueness of the author's artistic world. In contemporary literature, stylistic diversity has increased significantly. Traditional realism, modernist experimentation, postmodern irony, symbolic expression, documentary prose, and hybrid forms coexist within one literary space. This situation requires critics to be methodologically flexible and theoretically prepared.

The authorial position is another significant object of literary criticism. Every literary work expresses a certain attitude toward reality, even when this attitude is indirect or hidden. The critic must distinguish between the author, narrator, lyrical subject, and character. The direct identification of the author with the narrator or character may lead to incorrect interpretation. Therefore, modern literary criticism pays attention to narrative structure, point of view, irony, ambiguity, and the polyphonic nature of the text.

Reader reception has become one of the important dimensions of contemporary literary criticism. A literary work exists not only as a text written by the author, but also as a text read, understood, and interpreted by readers. Different historical periods and different social groups may interpret the same work in different ways. This does not mean that any interpretation is equally valid. Rather, it means that criticism should take into account the interaction between the text and the reader. Contemporary criticism therefore studies not only the author's intention, but also the reception, influence, and cultural circulation of the literary work.

The methodological foundations of literary criticism are diverse. The historical method remains one of the most stable approaches. It allows the critic to analyze literary works in connection with the social, cultural, and literary conditions of their time. A work cannot be fully understood without considering the period in which it

was created, the literary traditions it continues or transforms, and the ideological atmosphere that influenced it. However, historical analysis should not reduce a literary work to historical facts. The critic must also reveal its aesthetic independence and universal meaning.

The comparative method is especially important in contemporary literary criticism. Literature develops through interaction, influence, dialogue, and transformation. Comparative criticism helps to reveal the relationship between national and world literature, between classical and modern texts, between different genres and artistic systems. This method is particularly useful in the study of literary traditions, intertextuality, translation, cultural exchange, and typological similarities.

Hermeneutic methodology emphasizes interpretation. A literary text often contains symbolic meanings, implicit ideas, contradictions, and multiple layers of meaning. The task of the critic is not only to explain what is directly said, but also to reveal what is suggested, implied, or artistically encoded. Hermeneutic criticism requires attentiveness to detail, context, language, and the inner logic of the work. It also demands intellectual responsibility, because interpretation must be based on the text itself and not on arbitrary assumptions.

Structural analysis studies the internal organization of the literary work. It examines composition, plot, motif, character system, conflict, narrative structure, and linguistic organization. This approach is useful because it protects criticism from excessive subjectivity. When the critic analyzes how the parts of a work are connected and how they create artistic wholeness, the evaluation becomes more grounded and convincing.

Sociological and cultural approaches are also necessary for understanding the role of literature in society. Literary works often reflect social conflicts, moral problems, national identity, historical memory, gender relations, spiritual values, and ideological tensions. Literary criticism interprets these aspects and shows how literature participates in public consciousness. However, sociological interpretation must not replace aesthetic analysis. A literary work is not a political document or sociological report; it is an artistic structure. Therefore, social content must be analyzed

together with artistic form.

The role of literary criticism in the contemporary literary process is multidimensional. First of all, literary criticism performs an evaluative function. It identifies the artistic achievements and shortcomings of literary works. This function is especially important in a period when a large number of texts are published through traditional and digital platforms. The abundance of literary production creates the need for critical selection, professional evaluation, and aesthetic orientation. Without criticism, the literary process may lose its internal criteria and become dependent only on popularity or commercial success.

Secondly, literary criticism performs an interpretive function. Many contemporary literary works are complex in structure and meaning. They use intertextual references, fragmented narration, symbolic images, psychological ambiguity, and genre hybridity. The ordinary reader may not always fully understand such texts. Criticism helps to open the semantic layers of the work and to explain its artistic logic. In this sense, the critic acts as a mediator between the literary text and the reader.

Thirdly, literary criticism performs an educational function. It forms literary taste, develops critical thinking, and teaches readers to distinguish between genuine artistic value and superficial textual production. A strong critical tradition raises the cultural level of society. It encourages readers to approach literature thoughtfully, to understand artistic form, to appreciate language, and to think about moral and philosophical questions.

Fourthly, literary criticism contributes to the development of literature itself. Writers often respond directly or indirectly to critical thought. Serious criticism can reveal new tendencies, point out artistic weaknesses, and encourage creative renewal. In this sense, criticism is not external to literature; it is an active participant in the literary process. It influences the formation of literary movements, aesthetic programs, and creative debates.

In the contemporary literary process, the boundaries of literary criticism have expanded. Academic criticism, journalistic criticism, essayistic criticism, and digital criticism now coexist. Academic criticism is characterized by theoretical depth, methodological

consistency, and scientific terminology. Journalistic criticism is more operative and addresses a wider audience. Essayistic criticism combines analytical thought with individual style and personal reflection. Digital criticism appears in blogs, social networks, online platforms, and reader communities. Each of these forms has its advantages and limitations.

The development of digital communication has changed the nature of critical discourse. On the one hand, it has democratized literary discussion and allowed more readers to participate in the evaluation of literature. On the other hand, it has also created problems such as superficial judgment, emotional reaction, lack of methodological preparation, and the replacement of professional criticism by personal opinion. Therefore, the contemporary literary process needs professional criticism even more than before. Professional criticism differs from ordinary reader response by its theoretical knowledge, methodological discipline, ethical responsibility, and ability to evaluate literature within a broader cultural context.

One of the current problems of literary criticism is the balance between objectivity and subjectivity. Since literature is an aesthetic phenomenon, the critic's personal perception cannot be completely excluded. However, criticism must not become arbitrary impressionism. The critic's opinion should be supported by textual evidence, theoretical reasoning, historical context, and aesthetic criteria. Scientific objectivity in literary criticism does not mean the absence of personal position; it means the responsible justification of that position.

Another important issue is the relationship between tradition and innovation. Contemporary literature often experiments with form, language, genre, and narrative technique. Some innovative works may seem unusual or difficult at first. The critic must be able to distinguish true artistic innovation from artificial experimentation. At the same time, criticism should not reject new forms merely because they do not correspond to traditional norms. The task of criticism is to understand the artistic necessity of innovation and to evaluate whether it serves the internal logic of the work.

Literary criticism also plays an important role in preserving national literary identity. In the context of

globalization, national literatures interact actively with world literary processes. This interaction enriches literature, but it may also create the danger of imitation and loss of cultural specificity. Criticism helps to define the place of national literature in the world literary context and to protect the continuity of literary tradition. It evaluates how contemporary authors use national images, language, folklore, historical memory, and cultural symbols.

At the same time, literary criticism must be open to universal human values. Literature is national in form and universal in meaning. A literary work created in a specific cultural environment may express problems common to all humanity, such as freedom, justice, love, suffering, memory, alienation, moral choice, and the search for meaning. Criticism should reveal both the national and universal dimensions of literary works.

The ethical responsibility of literary criticism should also be emphasized. A critic's judgment can influence the reputation of an author, the reception of a work, and the direction of literary debate. Therefore, criticism must be fair, respectful, evidence-based, and intellectually honest. Critical evaluation may be sharp, but it should not become personal attack. The object of criticism is the literary work and the literary phenomenon, not the personality of the author.

Literary criticism is an essential component of the literary process and literary studies. Its theoretical foundations are based on the concepts of artistic value, genre, style, authorial position, reader reception, and the unity of content and form. Its methodological foundations include historical-literary, comparative, hermeneutic, structural, sociological, and cultural approaches. These methods allow criticism to analyze literary works in a comprehensive and scientifically grounded way.

The contemporary literary process has expanded the functions of literary criticism. Today, criticism not only evaluates literary works, but also interprets them, forms literary taste, guides readers, participates in cultural dialogue, and influences the development of literature. In the digital age, the need for professional, methodologically grounded, and ethically responsible criticism is increasing. Although reader opinions and online discussions have become more active, they cannot replace serious literary criticism based on

theoretical knowledge and analytical depth.

The role of literary criticism in contemporary literature is connected with its ability to identify artistic tendencies, distinguish genuine literary value, explain complex texts, and maintain the continuity between tradition and innovation. Literary criticism serves as a bridge between the author, the text, the reader, and society. Therefore, the development of literary criticism is one of the important conditions for the healthy development of the literary process and the strengthening of aesthetic consciousness in society.

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