

# An Analysis of Literary Criticism from the Macro Perspective

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**Abstract**—Literary criticism belongs to the category of literary reception. From the perspective of reception aesthetics, literary criticism is an important link in the realization of literary value and an important part of literature research. Literary criticism should complete the appreciation activities. What is important, it is necessary to make an effective explanation and evaluation of various literary phenomena on this basis. Therefore, it has the emphasis and the focus of literary criticism. This paper studies the literary criticism from three aspects of an overview of literary criticism, standards and types of literary criticism and movie and television literary criticism.

**Keywords**—macro perspective; literary criticism; analysis

## I. INTRODUCTION

As an essential part of literature and art, nowadays, literary criticism has become a very important discipline. It can be said that anyone who understands literature would be familiar with literary criticism. However, it is rather difficult to clearly state what literary criticism is. With the changes of the styles and forms of literary criticism, people's understanding of literary criticism is also constantly deepening.

## II. THE ORIGIN OF LITERARY CRITICISM

In China, "criticism" originates from the imperial examinations in the Song dynasty. It is the abbreviation of "commentary and comment" in the imperial examination. That is the critique of the article and the judgment such as the criticism and commentary. In the context of modern Chinese, one of the most common and generally accepted explanations is "to put forward shortcomings and mistakes specifically". However, "criticism" as a specialized academic term originates from the Western Greek, which means the "judgment". In "The Dictionary of Modern Western Literary Criticism" edited by Roger Fowler, "criticism" means "analysis" from the perspective of etymology. And later, it has the meaning of "evaluation". The "criticism" means "judgment", "argument", and "recognition" in English, Russian and German. The so-called "literary criticism" is the judgment and evaluation of literary works. In the late 17th century, the "father of British literary criticism", Dryden made the concept of literary criticism clear in English. And gradually, this concept was used by many people. In 1711, British poet, Pope published "Criticism", which accelerated

the schedule of widespread accepting the concept of literary criticism in western society. During the May 4th Movement, the term of literary criticism was translated from the West into Chinese. And gradually, it was accepted by the Chinese. Therefore, the term of "criticism" in literary criticism is translated from the West. It refers to the set of Western ideological systems and discourse systems rather than given and limited by Chinese culture.

19th-century literary critic Matthew Arnold gave the description of literary criticism. And it is non-utilitarian effort to learn and spread the known and considered best things in the world. The definition suggests that literary criticism is a disciplined activity that tries to describe study, analyze, prove, explain and evaluate the art works. Arnold would argue that this disciplined attempt must form some aesthetic and methodological principles. And then, the critics would make the evaluation of the text according to this definition. Anyone who tries to evaluate the text in this way is literary critic. The word of critic comes from two Greek words. One is krino, meaning the "judgment". The other is krites, which means "a judge or a jury member". Therefore, literary critics or kritikos are "literary judges". The first such judge in history was Philitas, a teacher in the fourth century. He came to Alexandria in the 305 BC. And he was a tutor to teach the toddler. Later, the child became King Ptolemy II, the second Pharaoh of the Ptolemaic Egypt. When Philitas judged the literature, he had actively involved in the normative activities of literary criticism.

With the function of literary criticism and its relationship between the literary criticism and the text, people would discover that it is usually not considered as an independent discipline. It must be related to other things (such as works of art). Without the works of art, there would have no criticism. Through critical discernment activities, we can consciously and intentionally explore some issues. And these issues would be helpful to define the humanity, to critique the culture, and to evaluate the actions and feelings. Also, they would simply enhance our appreciation and enjoyment of the literary works. They would improve the ability of the appreciation of fellow human beings.

When analyzing a text, literary critics would put forward some basic questions about the philosophy, psychology, functional and descriptive features of the text.

- Shall the text have only one correct meaning?

- Is the text always instructive? That is to say, must the reader learn something from each text?
- Can I read the text just for pleasure?
- Does the text affect every reader in the same way?
- How is the text affected by the culture of the author and the written period?
- What function does gender play in writing and reading texts?
- How do our personal feelings affect textual interpretation?
- Would the text be the catalyst of changes in the established culture?

Ever since the days of the ancient Greek philosophers Plato and Aristotle, critics and readers would argue over the answers to these and other similar questions. Through asking questions and thinking about O'Connor's text and any other texts, people can also participate in this on-going conversation. For example, you can query the motivation of bringing the cat while the family was on holiday in O'Connor's "A Good Man is Hard to Find". Also, you could ask if the emergence of co-workers was the main reason why granny experience epiphany. No matter what questions on O'Connor's text we put forward, there is an ongoing debate on the values and joys of O'Connor's short story. At the same time, people also intervened in literary criticism and played the roles as practical literary critics.

Traditionally, literary critics either set foot in theoretical criticism or set foot in practical criticism. The theory criticism systematically expounds the theory, principle and purpose of the nature and value of art. By citing the universal aesthetic and moral principles of art, theoretical criticism provides a necessary framework for practical criticism. Practical criticism is also known as applied criticism. And the theory and purpose of theoretical criticism would be applied to particular work. Pragmatic critics use theories and principles of theoretical criticism to define and justify the enjoyment of particular literary work. And they would make interpretation, evaluation and defense for it. Among practical critics, we can further differentiate absolutist and relativist critics. The absolutist critic assumes that only one theory or set of principles can be used in evaluating a literary work. However, the relativistic critics use various principles or conflicting theories to criticize the text. Literary theory is the foundation of any type of critic or any kind of criticism. Without theory, there would have no practical criticism.

### III. THE DEFINITION OF LITERARY CRITICISM

The two most fundamental problems encountered in the definition of literary criticism are:

First, what is the relationship among literary criticism and literary theory, literary history, literary criticism theory and literary criticism? Is literary criticism a theory or the practice?

Second, what kind of forms of knowledge is literary criticism: epistemology, axiology or artistic creation? Is literary criticism science or art?

In the history of the development of literary criticism, the concept of "literary criticism" is very vague. It is used for practical criticism of specific works of art. And it is also the reflection of the theory of literary criticism. That is to say, literary criticism explores the rule and category of criticism. It also refers to the entire literature and art, which includes literary criticism theory, literary criticism and literary history.

Therefore, what is literary criticism? Is it an ordinary appraisal of art works, a practical application of theory or an attempt to create the theory based on known facts? Sometimes, it may refer to one of these explanations. Commonly, it would confuse several interpretations together. Second, what is the criticism? Is it the expression of individual opinion of aesthetic literature? Is the dominant opinion of the ages represented by his or her own representative (past opinion, past experience and observation result)? There is no doubt that it is either the former or the latter. However, in the former case, it should step forward, find a discovery of new truth, broaden the boundaries of knowledge, or even change the boundaries completely. And it should be the cause of the genius. In the latter case, it would risk less. And we would be more confident. Also, we could keep the correct principle in the relationship of the times forever. In this sense, the former criticism is an exception to the general rule. And it is rare phenomenon. The second criticism is an effort to clarify and disseminate the dominant concept of aesthetic literature in its own time. In this age, the basic principle of the creation has been found. And this is the only purpose of criticism. It is the mission to know these rules theoretically. Also it should prove that these rules are truth in fact. The theory is systematic and harmonious unification of the rules of aesthetic literature. However, there is one disadvantage that it is only contained within a certain time. On the other hand, the criticism keeps making progress, moving forward and collecting new materials for science. It is aesthetics with constant movement, which is faithful to some principles. However, through a variety of different paths, it would lead you to get the progress in all aspects. This shows why criticism is so important and common. Also, it shows why it attracts so much attention and wins such great prestige. It is so powerful. The criticism is rare. Therefore, it should be highly valued. There are few people born with aesthetic feelings naturally. People can feel the impression of aesthetic literature. How much people would have such aesthetic feeling and the sensibility of this aesthetic impression?

This ambiguity of the concept of literary criticism is caused by the history. Due to the actual situation, the concept of "criticism" is greatly different in different countries. In "the history of modern criticism", Rene Wellek adopted the generalized concept of criticism. The term of "criticism" is widely used to explain the following aspects. It refers to the evaluation of individual works and the author. And it is clear and practical criticism. It symbolizes literary taste. Also, it mainly refers to the principles and theories of literature, the nature, creation, function and influence of literature, the

relationships between literature and other human activities, the types, means and techniques of literature, and the origin of literature and history. In China, the concept of literary criticism is equally unclear. According to Mr. Luo Genze's opinion, ancient Chinese literary criticism should be called "literary commentary". In the Han dynasty, Wang Heng pointed out that the function of "theory" is to distinguish the authenticity and falsehood of the book of secularism. And it aims to find the truth of the falsehood. That is to say, the collation and examination of the literature is consistent with the early "criticism" in the western. Cao Pi's "Classical Treatise: On Literary Writing" was the earliest literary criticism. And it took the "discussion" as the title. Therefore, Luo Genze believes that the Chinese translation of "criticism" must use the word of "discussion". Compared to "criticism" in ancient China, the "criticism" means "critique". And it doesn't include the criticism or punishment. However, there are differences between "discussion" in Chinese and "criticism" in the West. In "Annotation on Shuowen Jiezi", Duan Yucai would explain that the words should follow its theory. And then, we would get the theory. Therefore, the "discussion" emphasizes on the theory. Cao Pi's "thesis" isn't specific evaluation of the work. And it is based on the issues of literature. In contrast, the Chinese commentaries are more similar to practical criticisms of specific literary works in the West. The commentary is equal to the evaluation. In the early time, it is used in the evaluation of the characters. For example, it could take the law as the example. And the people in the Song dynasty should obey the law. And Han Zi would make the commentary. Then, Han Zi must be the people who obey the law. Then, in the field of literary criticism, Liu Xie pointed out that the critics would make the commentary in his work of "the literary mind and the carving of dragons". Zhong Rong has made the evaluation of the poems of more than 120 poets. And the collection of these evaluations is directly named as "critique of poetry"

In "History of Chinese Literary Criticism", Luo Genze paid special attention to the theoretical character of Chinese literary criticism. In his opinion, "theory" can better reflect the theoretical characteristics of Chinese literary criticism. Also, we can distinguish the characteristics of Western literary criticism focusing on practical criticism and critical theory. Similarly, Guo Shaoyu's "History of Chinese Literary Criticism" also solves many problems in the history of literature. This book emphasizes the connection among the criticism, literature and the thinking of the times. It focuses on the summary of the essence of literature and its laws. Therefore, their concept of "criticism" refers to critical theory and literary theory.

The purpose of criticism is to apply the theory to practice. The criticism would not take the aesthetic literature as the object. However, it would make the criticism with taking the related things as the object. No matter how modest, gentle, mild and deadly the words are, they are the discussion. An article dealing with the opinion of aesthetic literature could be called the criticism. An article dealing with the magazine is argumentation or general inference. An essay on the works of the poet proves why he is a real poet. An essay on the works of a fake poet would prove why he is a pretentious

poet. These articles are criticism. We could make an article to prove that he isn't a poet. And his works can't be examined. This is the argumentation. The word of "argument" doesn't mean abusiveness or controversy. Actually, it could be the commentary. Also, it is the expression of ordinary opinion about the literary object. The purpose of criticism is sublime. We could use speculation to test things. Conversely, the purpose of argument is low. That is to defend common sense. Criticism relies on speculation, and argumentation relies on common sense. The author thinks that it is necessary to make such distinction. Every article in China that deals with the literary object could be called criticism.

Undoubtedly, concepts such as "Chinese Literary Criticism", "Ancient Chinese Literary Criticism", "Poetry Criticism" and "Chinese Literary Theory" have not made much difference among many Chinese scholars. They would use these concepts optionally. For this reason, the definition of "criticism" in the Chinese academic community is also increasing and comprehensive. However, the meaning is not clear.

In "Encyclopedia of China — Chinese Literature", it has a definition of "literary criticism". According to certain criteria, the scholars should make the research, analysis, understanding and evaluation of the writer's works and literary phenomena (including literary movements, literary trends and literary genres, etc.). And it is the literary criticism. From the perspective of the definition, the scholars would use certain "standards" to study and evaluate literary works and literary phenomena. It is scientific. Also, it can be regarded as the most popular definition of criticism.

The scholars should master the concept of the literary criticism actually. However, it is necessary to pay attention to the following points. First, the "criticism" of "literary criticism" can't be narrowly interpreted as "picking up faults" or "finding weaknesses" in literary works. Otherwise, the "literary criticism" would be "critical literature". Second, the scholars should pay attention to its boundary among the narrow literary criticism, the generalized literary criticism, "literary criticism" and "literary theory". The so-called narrow literary criticism refers to the study of specific literary works. And the emphasis is on their evaluation. People could understand the broad sense of literary criticism according to the explanation in the "Encyclopedia of China — Chinese Literature" or the explanation in the new version of "Cihai". In certain politics and cultural background, literary critics would make the discussion, analysis and evaluation of the literary artists, works of art, literary trends and literary movement with the use of certain perspectives. Abroad, in "Encyclopedia of Britannica," the entry of "literary criticism" is explained as the following. "In a broad sense, literary criticism is the rational consideration of literary works and literary issues. As a terminology, whether or not they analyze a specific work, it can be applied to any argumentation about literature. The concept is same. Its understanding is different. And they have their own reasons. It is difficult to be reunified. This book mainly uses the broad concept in the process of discussion. That is to say, the so-called literary criticism includes the evaluation of the work



and the discussion of the theory of literature and art. However, it also emphasizes the evaluation of the work.

#### IV. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF LITERARY CRITICISM

It is generally believed that the study of literary theory include the study of the basic principles of literature, literary criticism and literary history. Literary criticism is a branch discipline that is paralleled with the study of the basic principles of literature and the study of literary history. Literary criticism is different from literary criticism. And there are differences and relations. Literary criticism refers to the activity of conducting research and analysis on specific writers or works. And they would make judgments and evaluations. Literary criticism studies some basic laws, principles and methods in literary criticism activities. And then, it would explore the basic characteristics, activities and ways of literary criticism. It would be unique literary activity. Literary criticism is the study of literary criticism. And literary criticism is the study of specific writers and works. The research objects are not the same. Specifically, literary criticism is the activity of specifying and evaluating literary phenomena centered on writers and works with a specific criterion of criticism. It has three characteristics.

##### A. *Literary Criticism Is the Research Activities of Science and Human*

In the history of Chinese and foreign criticism, there are different opinions on the nature of literary criticism. Some people think that criticism is science. They advocate rejecting subjectivity, opposing aesthetic, and using natural science methods to engage in literary criticism. Belinsky said that criticism was the science. Criticism is the science that reveals the beauty and shortcomings of literary and artistic works. [1] The new critic of the United States Lanserm also thinks that criticism must be scientific, precise and systematic. [2] They represent the tendency of scientism in literary criticism. On the contrary, some people think that literary criticism is a non-scientific activity. And it is the criticism of literature. It is one of the most humane forms of art. Therefore, they emphasize subjectivity, adhere to the aesthetic, and exclude science. For example, British writers and the theoretician Wilde thought that "criticism" was an art [3]. Mencken, the modern American critic believed that the criticism was self-expression of critics' nature. And they proclaim that the criticism is either an art or nothing [4]. They represent the tendency of humanism in literary criticism. In the history of criticism dominated by the West, the humanistic nature of literary criticism is often overwhelmed by scientism. In fact, all aspects of literary activities are full of humanity. For example, Liang Qichao's view on the role of literature is the case. In his opinion, novels are different from science. The surprises, sadness and inspiration would make the reader have immeasurable nightmares. And they would wipe out innumerable tears. He put forward the functions of literature such as "edify", "immerse", "emergence" and "inspiration". In his opinion, the people would be edified by the life. He who touches pitch will be defiled. The reader would enter into the book. The people would have the inspiration suddenly. And the reader

would be the master of the book. From the perspective of appreciation, Liang Qichao inspected the particularity of literary activities. And it highlighted the significance of human and showed the tendency of humanism. Also, it has inspired us to further understand the humanistic factors in literary criticism. Therefore, literary criticism should have two sides. On the one hand, as a research and evaluation activity, it needs to use the concepts, judgments and reasoning to complete the criticism activities in a fair and objective manner. It is rational and scientific. On the other hand, the object of criticism is literature, which is inseparable from the appreciation of the works. In turn, the critical activity would have emotional and aesthetic characteristic. And it shows irrational and non-scientific side. In short, it can't have the criticism without the science. Similarly, it can't produce the criticism without the humanism.

##### B. *Criticism Standards Play Central Role in Critical Activity*

Whether it is consciously or unconsciously, there must have the criticism standards. Criticism is the judgement. And the judgement must have the standard. Any criticism is the activities of standard application. Of course, in some specific criticism activities, some standards are specific. However, some standards are vague. And ambiguity does not mean that there is no standard. Some standards may be correct. Some standards may be wrong. However, the wrong concepts still have the standard. Criticism standards are the supporting points of criticism activities. Any evaluation of literature must center on and embody the value connotation of standards. Therefore, the standard of literary criticism occupies a central position in criticizing activities. This "center" is reflected in the standard of criticism, which is the object of evaluation. And it is an intermediary agent between the critics and the critics object. Also, it mainly reflects in the position, attitude, and the aesthetic and literary views.

##### C. *The Subjectivity of Literary Criticism*

The so-called subjectivity of literary criticism refers to the subjective initiative manifested by critics who are the main body of literary criticism in literary criticism activities, and the mental mark of the individual left in the process and final result of the criticism. In other fields of spiritual culture and art creation, human activities mainly are human-centered, reflecting the will, desire and demand of the subject.

It is a kind of subjective activity which imprinted the subject's consciousness tendency and personality characteristics. In the field of aesthetic appreciation and literary reception, literary criticism is also a very strong subjective human activity carried out by the subjects. As mentioned above, it takes the product of literary creation — literary works as its object. Through its feeling, comprehension, interpretation and evaluation of literary works, it transforms literary works into a new product form and value form. And then, it would achieve the social value and function. In this process, it also shows the individual characteristics of the critical subject as well as the opinions on the universal life, social history, the literature and art.

Therefore, the subjectivity of literary criticism can be fully reflected. In this sense, literary criticism is the practical activity of criticizing the subject to transform and change the object of criticism in a positive and dynamic way. At the same time, it is to criticize the subject to reform the object of criticism. With the object of criticism, it would confirm and realize the activity with self-awareness or self-power. The former is an objective manifestation of the subjectivity in literary criticism. The function and significance of the subject can only be manifested through the objective practice of criticism. The latter is the subjective form of the subjectivity of literary criticism. The existence and value of the subject depend on the experience and awareness of main body of the criticism. Strictly speaking, the subjectivity of literary criticism should include the contents and meanings of interdependence. This is an integrated and organic understanding of the subjective connotation of literary criticism. They are inseparable. Without the former, the subjectivity of literary criticism is only a kind of subjective idea of criticizing the subject, losing its realistic character and objective basis. Without the latter, there is no rational consciousness and action consciousness of the subject of literary criticism.

## V. CONCLUSION

The objects of literary criticism include literary works and various factors related to literary works. Only in this way can we accomplish literary criticism tasks from many perspectives and levels. Therefore, the object of literary criticism can be its phonetic, grammatical, linguistic and other factors. Also, it would be other factors related to literary works such as literary schools, literary trends and literary concepts, etc. In short, all literary phenomena related to literary works can be the object of literary criticism. In reality, some people may become the center of criticism in a certain period. And some people may wander on the edge forever. Whether they are at the center or the periphery, it should not lack the necessary conditions for literary works. The center or the edge only shows the different degree of concern on literary criticism. However, it can't deny that it would be the object of literary criticism. The object of criticism is the logic starting point of literary criticism. Without the objects, it can't start the literary criticism.

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