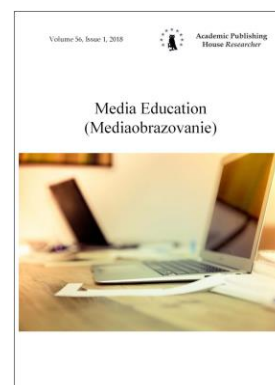




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Modern Literary Criticism in the Context of the New Culture Evolvement

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Abstract

Literary criticism in the Mass Media is affected by social and cultural changes in the society, which leads to new forms and methods of analysis and new ways to influence the audience. The article summarizes the research of the modern Media criticism, highlighting the opaqueness of the methodology, the criticism types having been transformed, stylistic subjectivity and genre verification of the criticism. Different directions of criticism, such as Media criticism, cinema criticism, literary criticism, theatre and music criticism are undergoing common processes of Media texts transformations that span around names, topics and events, relevant in the communicative discourse, rather than around the analysis of artistic process. Moreover, the analytical component of the statements shrinks, while the interpretative part, subjective evaluation of art and information loosely related to art expands.

The article analyzes the manuscript of representatives of scientific schools in the sphere of Media criticism of Belgorod State University and of Belarusian State University (Minsk), based at journalism departments, that have been exploring the process of literary criticism transformations for many years. The research is based on the analysis of articles and books, comparative approach, theoretical consolidation of the results of exploration of literary criticism.

Keywords: media criticism, literary and art criticism, methodology, media text, stylistics, genre, analysis, essays.

1. Introduction

Literary criticism – along with verbal means of mass communication in general – is being tested today as to its meaningfulness and resilience. Media transformations, active in the 1990s and conducted today in the new economic, technological and socio-cultural conditions, have affected the nature of critical thought expression in MassMedia, from analysis methods to genre and stylistics features. The old forms of critical expressions in the electronic and printed Mass Media have been changed to such an extent, that today one can hear claims that criticism has vanished and no longer bears any influence on the minds and hearts of the audience. Undoubtedly, such tendencies, besides leading to the loss of esthetic taste of the arts audience, create preconditions for mass dehumanization. Thus, the question of literary criticism existence is transferred from the sphere of professional literary and publicist activities to the sphere of cultural development problems. Hence, the purpose of this article is to define not only the chief tendencies of critical thought in the modern Mass Media, but also the direction of evolvement of the newest culture in its value dimension (the value of memory, common deal, perspective of development, etc.).

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2. Materials and methods

The grounds for the analysis of the state of modern literary criticism is the manuscript of the representatives of scientific schools in the sphere of Media criticism of Russian and Belarusian Universities – Belgorod State University and Belarusian State University (Minsk) respectively, “Criticism in the Context of the Modern Culture” (Criticism..., 2020).

The methodology of the analysis of the manuscript is based on the theoretical grounds on transformations of Media criticism as a product of social institute, as reflection on the changing literary and social processes, as literary and journalism activity. New tendencies of literary criticism are conditioned by the interconnection of reality phenomena and unity of historical pace of development. The research is based on the analysis of articles and books as well as on the comparative approach. The following methods are applied: literature analysis, theoretical analysis and synthesis, and generalization.

3. Discussion

Presenting cultural activity as cognitive-evaluative with the defining models as analytical, a renowned researcher A. Korochensky in his research on media-criticism writes about co-existence of authoritarian, or dominating, political, oligarchic, scientific, intra-corporate, or professional criticism, and, per se, media-criticism, or criticism in Mass Media. The author considers the latter, analytical criticism model to be domineering, due to the mass character of the audience, involved into communication, and that is why he calls it mass criticism, as opposed to elitist one, produced by political, economic, professional and scientific elites. However, at the same time, the researcher points out to the tendencies of boundaries erasure between these two critical statements about modern culture. Thus, one could speak both about the critical thought getting more massive and about the critical thought getting more intellectual, engaged into “exploration of relations between culture and the natural world and a diverse social practice” (Korochensky, 2003: 31).

Quality changes of the critical thought pertain, in the first place, to the function and style. Mass criticism in printed editions focuses not so much on the analysis of the current literary process (since the update and selection is successfully fulfilled by the Internet channels), as on the evaluation of the works of art in the context of socially significant or relevant ones. Journalism criticism draws attention to classic names, as well as modern artistic tendencies, and up-to-date “heavy” works of elitist art. Literary critic I. Shevliakova-Borzenko notes a “prolonged conceptual and methodological break” and “multiplication of individual strategies of authors” (Criticism..., 2020: 30) in Media critical claims, meaning the patchy type of interpretation ways and art assessment in the modern media-sphere with its varied formats.

However, some researchers endeavor to differentiate the methods of modern criticism. Thus, T. Orlova, the leading theatrical critic and a researcher of art-journalism, discerns two critical approaches: traditional and innovative. Defining the new context for theatre criticism, in particular, finding its expression in the “global transformation” of culture, in establishing a new type of mass consciousness (postmodern), the researcher admits in conclusion the existence of both old and new, innovative criticism forms, characterized by elitism, irony, and blurred genre (Orlova, 2009: 14-21). As we can see, T. Orlova registers stylistic, not methodological changes of critical materials. Most researches mark some quality changes of criticism, primarily pertaining to the function and the style.

I. Shevliakova-Borzenko distinguishes such a phenomenon of the 2000-s as “literary journalism”, formed due to media professions becoming “mass”. “Its genre range is quite humble: literary journalist is at its depth in small format genres of an advertising sketch, essay style annotation (on different events of a literary life, such as a published text, a presentation, an award or a scandal) and, in particular, of a sketch based on literary life and literary context” (Criticism..., 2020: 45). The major function of such journalism is marketing, advertisement and PR of books of fiction and their authors. Hence, a cinema criticism researcher L. Sayenkova-Melnitskaya remarks, “the turn of the century criticism can be defined as promotional-representative or mass-culture criticism” (Criticism..., 2020: 85). It seems to us that is a general tendency of the modern culture, developing in the market economy conditions and within expanding service sector, with its strategy of brand’s survival and promotion. Literary criticism becomes an instrument of public relations technology.

A. Korochensky defines such transformations in mass criticism as tendencies of development of post-journalism related to the cult of media celebrities, hedonism boost due to increase of

entertainment constituent in mass media, and hybridization of media texts that gain features of promotional and PR materials of journalism and infotainment ([Criticism..., 2020: 126](#)).

Marking the changes in the modern process of critical procession of culture, many refer to the past to reconstruct a chain of development and define the principles of critical thought genesis. T. Orlova opposes the principles of organization of a classic theatre performance and review to its modern modelling of a successful show and effective critical statement. Music critic A. Karpilova highlights the priority of educational functions of musical criticism in the Soviet period and subjectivity and non-professionalism of a statement in the modern media sphere. L. Saenkova-Melnitskaya goes into detail researching the changes of cinema criticism, born out of synthesis of science and journalism, and split later into conceptual-analytical and journalistic. The latter is marked by issues of ideology and moral, and was developed by the end of the XX century into “the criticism of moral anxiety”, uniting “the research of cinema imagery and explication of deep moral collisions” ([Criticism..., 2020: 84](#)), but, as mentioned above, it has transformed into “mass culture criticism”. I. Shevliakova-Borzenko defined “the golden age” of the literary criticism to be between the first third of the XIX c and the 1980-s of the XX century, when it played the role of the social and cultural regulator. Unlike in the newest period (from the end of the 1980s) that includes “a massive reputational crisis” (up to the 2000s), “an ethnographic period” (after the 2000s), and a period of “gathering, catalogue creating and consolidating “the assets” of the literary criticism as a relevant socio-cultural phenomenon” ([Criticism..., 2020: 38](#)). According to the researcher, the stylistic variability, the diversity of forms and ways of today’s critical statements are both the expression of crisis and the strategy of survival, or gathering strength for the future existence.

Changes in the criticism under the influence of it-technologies led to the advent of network criticism that has not received a general definition in the scientific literature, and can be defined as civil, user, amateur, non-professional, or mundane criticism. Spontaneity, intensity, subjectivism, provocative character, interactivity are among its chief characteristics and researchers note both positive and negative parameters of the “non-systematic” criticism. On the one hand, it activates the audience, more and more people are engage in opinion exchange. A. Korochensky claims, “a developed “non-professional” media-criticism can potentially become not only a channel of public expression of reactions and information needs of the audience and defense of the mass information consumers’ rights in their relations with media-industry, but also a “laboratory” of the generation of new citizenship apt for the new reality of the information era” ([Criticism..., 2020: 133](#)).

On the other hand, non-professional statements lower down the quality of such communication: “Mundane criticism”, built up on trivial truths, straightforward assumptions and talks to the network resources participants in the language of kitsch” ([Criticism..., 2020: 111](#)). Eventually it annuls the serious critical atmosphere, gives rise to a false concept of the time being non-critical, the critics being phantom, according to I. Shevliakova-Borzienko, and the period being the period of “criticism without criticism”, by the definition of L. Saenkova-Melnitskaya ([Criticism..., 2020: 84](#)). As a result, the criticism image drops, there appears a communicative gap both with the readers and between the scientific and professional criticism, and the criticism loses its collective capacity to influence artistic process.

In the crisis period of adaptation to the new media conditions, one naturally looks for the new genre and stylistic forms of communication with the reader and viewer’s audience. I. Shevliakova-Borzenko compares this period with the ancient Greek image of Proteus, multifaceted ([Criticism..., 2020: 32](#)), since the criticism of today is really varied. Quality changes of the criticism relate primarily to the functions and the style. While one of the priority goals of the modern criticism is the promotion of personal brand, the text of the critical statement itself gets more complicated stylistically with its interpretations and assessment becoming more subjective.

The researchers of literary criticism write about lack of the “tools”, or the analysis method. I. Shevliakova-Borzenko mentions a “suspended conceptual and methodological pause” ([Criticism..., 2020: 30](#)) in critical statements. Variability of fundamental concepts definitions is typical of critical texts.

Thus, the chief function of media criticism, according to A. Korochensky, is “defining the degree of social realism of Mass Media” and “adjusting the public’s perception of media content” ([Criticism..., 2020: 122](#)), which explains his definition of the media criticism – “operative evaluative recognition of social functioning of the mass media information” ([Criticism..., 2020: 122-123](#)).

At the same time, I. Shevliakova-Borzenko regards media criticism as a field for constructing “personal critical strategies” (Criticism..., 2020: 59), from guarding or liberal, i.e. politically relevant, to those close to scientific, semiotic-semantic and literary journalism, creating the image of the critics author. The researcher comes back to the idea that the modern criticism varies in genres and stylistics depending on personal theme preferences. Besides, she highlights that the concept “media criticism” is regarded differently in the western and eastern traditions. In the Belarusian and Russian communication space this concept is interpreted in a wide way – from analytical works per se to “the general background of lack of satisfaction with the quality of modern literary criticism, some sort of “discourse” noise”(Criticism..., 2020: 62). This way, the author reiterates the turn away from objective critical consideration towards subjective and emotional statements, conditioned by personal qualities. In the network criticism, based on the spread of literature-centered blogs, the researcher notes a formation of a special criticism genre – “virtual entity” (Criticism..., 2020, 49). A. Karpilova, in support of his colleague, separates the notions of “musical criticism” and columnist writing, or “statement of author opinion”, “quite a free author expression”(Criticism..., 2020: 112).

Reinforcement of subjective and personality-oriented element in the critical discourse made L. Saenkova-Melnitskaya define modern criticism as “role criticism, in which authors play out certain role models becoming certain characters of their own texts”(Criticism..., 2020: 87). According to I. Shevliakova-Borzenko, the tendency to subjectivity leads to refocusing from analysis to informing, announcement, promotion of the work of art, on the one hand, and to expanding forms of interpretational strategies, on the other hand: from destroying traditional concepts to “non-judgmental considerations of the new mentality” (Criticism..., 2020: 41). Fundamentally, criticism of today refuses to play a didactic upbringing function, rejecting defined moral guidelines and judgments: “Consciousness chaos of the modern man is described not in the moral and mental system of coordinates, but in the mental and psychological system of coordinates. The opposition “norm-deviation” is not relevant since the elusive phantom of being does not have poles as particular guidelines...”(Criticism..., 2020: 43).

In this discourse, there are also extremities, registered by L. Saenkova-Melnitskaya, such as critics falling back on “certain provocative tricks: intentional silencing (or avoiding mentioning) of the core meaning of the work, or pointedly careless treatment of the name of the author” (Criticism..., 2020: 87-88). Being provocative is one of the tendencies of the new critical thought style. Moreover, at the same time, the subject matter of the analysis and evaluation is not the literary process, but events around literary life and pseudo cultural phenomena.

4. Results

Stylistic changes of the critical statements can be put down to the addressee being indeterminate: reduction of specialized media, or focusing on mass media audience in the first place. Hence the stylistic obscurity, negligence, simplification and search for “a new metalanguage” (Criticism..., 2020: 50). Discussing genre transformations, researchers write both about topic changes and about structural and axiological changes. The authors note “quasi-critical activity” (Criticism..., 2020: 51) in the formation of new genre forms, related to the expansion of media presence, primarily on the Internet.

Still belonging to the information-analytical genre direction, representatives of the newest criticism aim at “pointedly minimalistic critical reviews... with a highest possible reflection subjectivity”(Criticism..., 2020: 45). Expanding their presence in the electronic mass media of communication, the authors develop “a specific style universality” (Criticism..., 2020: 53), with the domination of informative (or promotional) element, “quantitative characteristics (number of likes, comments, reviews, rates, income, top lists)”, “quite scarce and openly provocative statements-recommendations”(Criticism..., 2020: 85-86).

Morphological flexibility of genres creates theoretical difficulties for the research. Thus, in the study “Criticism in the context of modern culture” there are, for example, different interpretations of the concept of essay. I. Shevliakova will have it with a negative connotation, claiming an unusual popularity of this genre today: she speaks about “everything turning into essays, totally and ruthlessly” (Criticism..., 2020, 44) with its tendency “towards reduction, “merging” genres and at the same time dividing texts into chunks or small fragments” (Criticism..., 2020: 43). The researcher points out to the prevalence of small forms, such as essays, short review or comment. Yet, in the text of L. Saenkova-Melnitskaya, an essay is the focus of esthetic or literary

point of an analytical statement. She puts forward an argument that critical “texts have lost essay-analytical aspect”(Criticism..., 2020: 85) (i.e. essay genre disappears from practice) and grounds this argument on the statement that modern criticism does not have the status of “moving esthetics”, or esthetic criteria. Choosing this or that genre core, structural-cognitive or axiological, respectively, researchers come to different conclusions.

Returning to the image of Proteus, who one of the authors of the study compared modern criticism to, due to its multiple faces, let us remember that it is this mythological deity who disclosed, according to Homer, the path of the son to the father (Telemachus in search of Odysseus). Hence, this symbol can reveal the image of the future.

5. Conclusion

Belarusian and Russian researchers of the modern literary criticism are trying to reflect on its forms, methods, functional vectors in the context of informational and communicative transformations of the last decades. Media criticism, or the criticism in Mass Media, continues dominating in the social space, yet at the same time there is a perceptive tendency to blur the boundaries between art history and journalism statements, between professional and amateurish comments. Researchers note critical statements becoming more subjective and consequently specialized editions, by the type of art, becoming more scarce and informative verbal and digital editions becoming more varied. Modern criticism is marked by stylistic diversity, or rather opaqueness, negligence and simplification. Which leads to changing functions and goals of the criticism and its stylistics. Media criticism more and more frequently targets not the analysis of the current artistic process, but the up-to-date in the communicative discourse names, topics and events. Thus, the analytical component of the statement, conditioned by the methodology, gets annulled, while the interpretational and subjective part of the artistic process expands and there are more and more statements on things related to literature, cinema, theatre, etc.

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