



The Intrinsic Relationship Between Literary Theory and Criticism — Based on the Analysis of Bressler's "Literary Criticism: An Introduction to Theory and Practice"

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Abstract: The convergence and integration of literary criticism and literary theory has opened up a new world of literary creation, which has improved literary creation and promoted the development and prosperity of literature and art. With the increasingly strong voice of "theoreticalization of criticism and criticism of theory" in the literary and art circles, it has become a hot topic in academic circles to reveal how theory generates criticism and narrow the distance between literary criticism and literary theory. On the basis of in-depth analysis of Charles E. Bressler's classic academic work — "Literary Criticism: An Introduction to Theory and Practice", this paper cuts in from the perspective of "readers" and uses "text reading" as a bridge. By exploring the multiple identities of readers in reading, the paper gradually dissects the intrinsic relationship and influencing factors between theory and criticism in the process of reading, as well as how theory generates criticism. It is intended to contribute to the construction of literary theory and literary criticism, as well as to provide valuable reference and reference for related research in the academic community.

Keywords: text, reading, reader, literary theory, literary criticism

1. Introduction

Literary criticism is the result of reading, which is the activity to interpret literature that gives analysis, research and comments for literature based on literature theory. Literary theory is concerned with the nature, characteristics, laws of development and principles of social functions of literature. The mutual convergence and integration of literary criticism and literary theory has opened up a new world for literary creation, and thus literary creation will be improved, promoting the development and prosperity of literature and art.

Since the threshold of the new century, the vitality of literary theory has been overshadowed greatly compared with the unprecedented development of literary criticism with great depression. Conservative and backward literary theory will fail to guide and promote vigorous literary criticism. From the perspective of people's views, there is a increasing gap between literary criticism and literary theory. Nowadays, with the recognition and attention of the literary and art circles, the voice of "theorization of criticism, criticism of theory" is gaining increasing popularity in the literary and art circles. Therefore, it has become a hot issue in academic circles to reveal how theory generates criticism and shorten the distance between literary criticism and literary theory.

As one of the most influential classics of contemporary American literary criticism, Charles E. Bressler's *Literary Criticism: An Introduction to Theory and Practice* expounds many abstract theoretical concepts between literary theory and literary criticism in a simple way. Among them, Bressler, with his profound literary restraint and knowledge, elaborated his own unique views on "the relationship between theory and criticism". Under the enlightenment of Bressler's *Literary Criticism: An Introduction to Theory and Practice*, the following text begins with the basic structure of the text and the hidden relationship between literary theory and criticism is gradually revealed.

2. Re-creation and interpretation of texts in the reading

There will certainly be a blank or undetermined in any text, and the uncertain point of the text can be developed based on the blank parts. These blank parts and uncertainties jointly form the most fundamental structure of the text, the calling structure with an open structure that was created by the famous receptive aesthetician Wolfgang Iser. It can fully mobilize the reader's initiative, prompting the reader to enrich and confirm the text through re-creation in the process of reading, and finally achieve the concretization of the text.

In the opinion of Roman Ingarden, a Polish phenomenological aesthetician, that literary text is an outline schema full of undetermined contents and blanks, and readers' determination of the undetermined contents and blanks contributes to

the realization of the text. He held that the imaginative processing of readers in the process of reading enables the literary text to change from the original discrete schematization structure into a concrete whole. Ingarden's ideas greatly influenced Iser. Iser pointed out clearly in the "Calling Structure of the Text" that blank is an important structural mechanism for text summoning readers.

Why does a blank space in a text call upon the reader, or rather, why does a calling structure lead to a re-creation of the text? The above mentioned questions can be analyzed and answered according to gestalt psychology theory. Gestalt psychology school think that when people are confronted with an imperfect, incomplete shape will automatically generate a internal force that makes cerebral cortex in tension state, promoting people to fill the vacancy in imperfect shape on his own initiative, intending to make it to be a relatively complete state, in order to satisfy the demands of the inner "perfection".

Therefore, When reading a literary text containing blank space, the reader will unconsciously develop some kind of mental tension in his perception, which exerted a dramatic call on the readers, and urged readers to give full play to the existing experience, thoughts, emotions, precipitation, etc., association and imagination to fill gaps in the text so as to eliminate this kind of mental tension. This kind of spiritual tension is the calling power of the calling structure, which generates the calling power for readers precisely because of the existence of blank in the text. With the elimination of the tension brought by this spiritual tension, readers quietly complete the re-creation of the text. Thus, when the reader begins to read the text, the identity has been upgraded to the participant and creator of the text.

Max Wertheimer, an outstanding representative of the Gestalt school of psychology, once pointed out that "one can surely see something additional besides the sum of all the isolated contents in tunes, spatial images, etc.," Therefore, in the process of reading, the reader is not only reading what is displayed in the text, but also reading what is outside the text, and these other things are what the reader fills in. By filling the gaps in the text, the reader completes the re-creation of the text, and makes the created text to conform to the individual imagination world as much as possible. As Iser elucidate, the text calls up the reader's strong expectation of the existing vision, in order to break it and obtain a new vision.

In this way, in order to gain a new perspective, the reader dives into the text to make sense of the text. During this period, the blank in the text provides a good opportunity for readers, who will consciously or unconsciously raise and explore some problems that may be caused by the existence of blank in the text. In essence, these questions are the same as those raised by literary critics when reading an unfamiliar text. After careful reading, the reader engages in a series of interactions with the text. Readers fully integrate their personal emotions into the text world, developing their personal opinions and opinions on some issues, which are clear or unclear. Interpretations were made on logicity, illogicity, completion and in-completion. At this point, the reader has become a literary critic, the key issue is that whether the readers can be a literary critic with discipline mentioned by Matthew Arnold. In conclusion, readers are not only the participants and creators of texts, but also the critics and interpreters of texts.

3. Establishment of literary theory in the process of reading

As an interpreter of a text, there will certainly be interactions between readers and the text when they read, as a result, questions related to the text will be proposed. In the process of searching for answers and responding to the text, readers are also involved in the construction of literary theories. When reading texts, readers always develop a psychological state of denying the existence of intertextuality between texts, and the majority of readers' responses to texts are "regulated or socially constructed reflections". Thus, the way in which the reader generalizes the meaning of the text depends in part on the reader's personal experience. In order to adapt to the expectation of reading the text, readers' personal experience will gradually be developed into a temporary personal philosophical system in their consciousness, which is "composed of assumptions or presuppositions about the basic constitution of the world". These assumptions are not immutable, which change and evolve as readers interact with the outside environment, the non-self and the self. These dynamic assumptions and readers' doubts to them strongly support and assist readers to understand the text language and make the meaning of the text, and greatly influence and determine readers' responses to the text.

Based on the essence of personal philosophy system, it is a simple, general and rough literary theory, in other words, literary theory is gradually constructed and perfected on its foundation. When reading any literary text, personal philosophical system can be adopted as a measuring stick to evaluate and determine whether elements in the text produce good or bad, moral or immoral, beautified or terrible effects and so on. That is, "Starting from the philosophical core of the belief system ,their assessment on the goodness, merit, and value of the work of art itself. Will be emanated". In the process of reading the text, if readers can accurately clarify their personal philosophical system and explain how it directly affects their own values and aesthetic judgment of the text, it will almost form a relatively systematic literary theory.

4. Influence of literary theory on literary criticism

The reader's reaction and interpretation of the text emanates on a theoretical basis. Readers' theoretical basis may be explicitly defined with rich contents and complete structure. Instead, it can be vague in definition with poor contents and incomplete structure, which directly determine and lead to the coherence, logic of readers' interpretation of the text. Well-defined, rich, and well-structured rationale can develop a reader's approach to "establishing a coherent way of justifying, arranging, and clarifying the principles of their textual evaluation." Once these principles are formed, they will guide and help readers analyze, explain and evaluate the rationalization of the text when they read it later. Although each reader interprets the text on different theoretical basis, some readers will eventually tend to support a literary theory similar to their theoretical basis, and gather together into a school of critical theory. Therefore, every reader is a believer and supporter of a certain literary theory.

Literary theory provides readers with a view of life and helps them understand why they react to a text in a certain way, or interpret a text in a certain way. Therefore, literary theory was frequently used to asks readers in a metaphorical way, what is it that affects them when they read a text? Whether it lies in family background, religion or social viewpoint, such questions and their corresponding answers will pose direct and indirect effect on readers' interpretation of the text. That is, when the reader makes an interpretation of the text, literary theory in turn questions the common-sense interpretation of the text, thus prompting the reader to explore the factors behind the initial reaction. A logical literary criticism can be constructed if the reader articulates his or her underlying assumptions about how to read the text.

5. Conclusion

Readers enjoys multiple identities when reading texts as both creators, participants, interpreters and critics of texts. The reader recreates the text and, at the same time, has a series of interactions with the text, which specifically means that the text arouses relevant questions and enables the reader to generate statements, interpretations and emotions about them. In the process of reading a text and discovering answers to questions, the reader responds to or interprets the text. During this period, readers are truly immersed in literary theory and criticism.

Literary theory gives preference to the understanding of certain concepts and assumptions, while literary criticism offers priority to the analysis and interpretation of texts. The concepts and assumptions concerned by literary theory are the structural foundation of literary criticism. Therefore, literary criticism is a literary activity based on the ever-changing and evolving category of literary theories. The process of readers' initial reaction to the text and corresponding interpretation failed to be achieved without the strong support of literary theory. When readers interpret a text, literary theory arouses readers to doubt their own common-sense interpretation of the text, inspiring them to explore the factors behind their initial response, and thus prompting readers to re-examine their own interpretation of the text for integration of a standard, clear, logical literary criticism.

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