THE IMPORTANCE OF LITERARY THEORY IN 21ST CENTURY WORLD LITERATURE

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Abstract: This article examines the significance of literary theory in twenty-first century world literature. Particular attention is devoted to the evolution of literary theory, the relationship between theory and interpretation, the role of critical approaches in global literary studies, and the influence of digital technologies on literary criticism. Furthermore, the article analyzes the importance of literary theory in intercultural dialogue, identity construction, ideological critique, and academic research. The study concludes that literary theory remains an indispensable component of modern literary scholarship and continues to shape the development of global literary discourse.

Keywords: literary theory, world literature, criticism, interpretation, postmodernism, digital humanities, globalization, intercultural studies, literary discourse, comparative literature.

Literature has always reflected the intellectual, emotional, and cultural experiences of humanity. Across different historical periods, literary works have served as mediums for artistic expression, moral reflection and cultural preservation. However, the interpretation of literature has changed significantly over time. In the twenty-first century, literary studies have become increasingly interdisciplinary, global, and theory-oriented.

Literary theory plays a central role in modern literary scholarship because it provides conceptual and methodological tools for analyzing texts. Without theoretical approaches, literary interpretation risks remaining subjective and limited. Literary theory allows scholars to examine hidden meanings, ideological structures, linguistic patterns, and sociocultural contexts embedded within literary works.

The development of globalization and digital communication has transformed the nature of literature itself. Contemporary literature crosses national boundaries and reflects diverse cultural identities, migration experiences, political conflicts, and technological realities. Consequently, literary theory has become essential for understanding the complexity of modern literary discourse.

The purpose of this article is to examine the importance of literary theory in twenty-first century world literature by analyzing its historical evolution, methodological functions, interdisciplinary significance, and role in contemporary literary criticism.

The origins of literary theory can be traced to classical antiquity. Ancient Greek philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle established the foundations of literary criticism and aesthetic thought. Plato viewed literature as imitation and questioned its moral and social influence. Aristotle, in contrast, emphasized the artistic and psychological functions of literature in his work *Poetics*.

Aristotle's concepts of mimesis, catharsis, plot structure, and characterization became fundamental principles of literary analysis. Classical literary theory focused primarily on aesthetic form, rhetorical techniques, and moral values. [1,85]

During the medieval and Renaissance periods, literary criticism was closely connected with religion, humanism, and classical traditions. Literature was interpreted according to ethical, philosophical, and theological principles.

Modern literary theory developed significantly in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Romanticism emphasized imagination, individual creativity, and emotional expression. Later, formalist and structuralist approaches introduced scientific and linguistic methods into literary studies. [2, 102]

Structuralism, influenced by Ferdinand de Saussure's linguistic theories, analyzed literature as a system of signs and structures. [3, 45]

In the second half of the twentieth century, poststructuralism challenged the stability of meaning and emphasized ambiguity, multiplicity, and textual indeterminacy. Scholars such as Jacques Derrida, Roland Barthes, and Michel Foucault transformed literary criticism by questioning traditional assumptions about authorship, language, and interpretation.

Contemporary literary theory is characterized by plurality and interdisciplinarity. Modern literary criticism integrates perspectives from sociology, psychology, anthropology, philosophy, gender studies, media studies, and digital technology. [4,77]

The twenty-first century has also witnessed the expansion of global literary studies. Scholars increasingly examine transnational literature, migration narratives, postcolonial identities, and intercultural communication.

Literary theory now functions not only as a method of textual interpretation but also as a framework for understanding broader social, political, and cultural processes.

Literary theory provides systematic approaches for analyzing literary texts. Different theories emphasize different aspects of literature, such as language, ideology, psychology, gender, or reader response. For example, structuralism focuses on narrative structures and linguistic patterns, while psychoanalytic criticism examines unconscious desires, symbolism, and psychological conflict. Feminist criticism explores gender relations and representations of women, whereas postcolonial criticism analyzes issues of colonialism, power, and cultural identity.

Without theoretical frameworks, literary interpretation may remain superficial or purely impressionistic. Theory allows scholars to develop coherent analytical methodologies and critical perspectives.

The importance of literary theory in twenty-first century world literature cannot be overstated. Literary theory provides essential conceptual and methodological tools for interpreting literary texts, understanding cultural processes, and analyzing ideological structures.

In the context of globalization, digitalization, and intercultural communication, literary theory has become increasingly interdisciplinary and internationally relevant. Contemporary literary criticism integrates perspectives from linguistics, psychology, sociology, philosophy, gender studies, media studies, and environmental studies.

Theoretical approaches enable scholars and readers to examine literature critically and explore the complex relationships between language, culture, power, identity, and society. Literary theory also contributes to the development of critical thinking, intercultural awareness, and intellectul creativity.

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