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## Literocentrism of Modern Criticism

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*The article proves the thesis about literocentrism of a modern professional reader's critical thinking. It is contrary to the traditional perception of literary situation of the end of the XX - beginning of the XXI centuries, a period of crisis of literocentrism. The article bases upon the material, covering literary criticism of liberal and patriotic magazines, postmodern criticism, new criticism of the 2000-s. Signs of literocentrism show in each of them: finding out topical answers and truths in a fiction text, their transfer to a reader in the form of patterns of behavior / thinking, the authority of the classical literature, etc. At the turn of the XX-XXI centuries an elite writer turned into an intellectual who stopped teaching and prophesying. Literature, especially poetry, is aware of the incompleteness of understanding. Literary criticism notes it but changes neither instrumentally norgnoseologically.*

*Keywords: literocentrism, crisis of literocentrism, literary criticism, liberal and patriotic magazines / criticism, postmodern criticism.*

### Introduction

At the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century the crisis of literocentrism is given two extreme characteristics: that of a national disaster and that of a human salvation, a chance to learn to think autonomously. Literocentrism as well as the absence of it is a mental fact. In this regard literary criticism is analyzed as the material giving an idea of a modern reader. At this we base upon the following understanding of literocentrism in criticism: literocentrism is finding out topical answers and truths in a fiction text, their transfer to a reader in the form of patterns of behavior / thinking.

The analysis of critical literary texts written at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century has resulted in the following conclusion: being categorical towards the

crisis of literocentrism, the majority of the critics stick to literocentrism in their interpretational strategies and their understanding of a writer's role and "a writer – a reader" dichotomy.

### Forms of literocentrism in various types of Russian criticism

The most vivid signs of literocentrism reveal themselves in the criticism of "patriotic" magazines. Crisis is slightly reflexed by this criticism. The idea of a patriotic edition is based on a strong belief in an exceptionally important role of a writer-prophet who knows the truth; on a magazine's mission of a fighter for the intellects of the society; on the idea of a reader-subscriber, trusting a word.

It is literocentrism that explains the tendency of creation of character sketches which clearly manifests itself in patriotic criticism. A critic's task is to portray a writer-citizen and fighter for traditional values, to embody his life as the evidence of truth of values translated by the "patriots" (See (Kovtun, 2013) about patriarchal values in modern traditionalistic prose). Three plots can be distinguished in "patriotic" critics' literary portraits (See (Vasil'ev, 2009) about plot typology). These are the plot of trial, the plot of the "prodigal son" (See (Toporkov, 2009) about the plot of a journey from a province to the capital and back regarded as the search for self-identity), and the plot of implicit authenticity. They reflect possible referent patterns for a reader who is supposed to extract patterns from literature (Govorukhina, 2013). A hero of every character sketch is represented as a unique personality, possessing knowledge that a writer got intuitively, from God, from nature, from a dramatic life experience. Thus, according to P. Tkachenko, Ia. Smeliakov clearly sees the nature of correlation of the Russian and the Soviet and believes that the Soviet period is a logical stage in a tragic history of the country and that one should live in the present, be proud of it and leave a tragic past (Tkachenko 2013, p. 228). In P. Tkachenko's opinion, a poet's evolution from revolutionary consciousness to traditional one is that true pattern to be followed by everyone who, having rejected a difficult Soviet period in the history of the country in their time, brought a new trouble (Tkachenko, 2013). A mystic halo of a writer's life, a motif of predestination of a course of life, and creative development are constant parts in the texts of such a genre. Thus, in a literary portrait "Neozhidannaia proza Leonida Borodina" ("Leonid Borodin's unexpected prose") we read: "He could probably have made a good police officer but the fate ordered otherwise. But what I am sure of is that Borodin was doomed to be a

writer. Calling for writing is embodied initially. Had his fate changed or had he traded places with Rasputin, they both would have turned out to be writers anyway" (Bondarenko, 1998, 247).

In fiction texts a patriotic critic is inclined to search for the patterns of behavior (including "semiotic and teleological patterns of linguistic behaviour" (Klukanov, 2002)) and thinking which he considers to be saving in a present-day situation of value disorientation. It is the space itself that is often viewed to be saving (See (Anisimov, 2004) about the topic of Siberia as a province, its origin, Siberian text). A writer's pointing gesture is read by the patriots, and this viewing system also results from their literocentric thinking. Whether or not a writer aims at teaching and sharing knowledge has become one of the most important criteria in estimation of his work's value (evaluation is viewed here as a social act in which a critic is guided by institutional norms and restrictions (Wouter de Nooy, 1999)). Thus, V. Kurbatov reproaches contemporary authors for their position of art dismissal, opposing them to writers who focused not on form but meaning (Kurbatov, 2010).

A critic blaming literature for the problems of modern day society must be literocentric. By this he believes that literature offers absolute impact force, organizes / corrupts the minds. According to V. Kurbatov, poetry is guilty of vulgarity and nonentity of present life (Ibid.). N. Bludilina also asserts that horror stories of modern literature inevitably cultivate fear, horror, negative image, and disorientation (Bludilina, 2012).

Indisputable authority of classical literature is also literocentric for a patriotic critic who enjoys making use of his authority to appropriate and form true field of literature (See (Anisimova, 2011) about re-actualization of classical literature as a factor of a writer's identity; (Krylov, 2012) about methodological guidelines for functional analysis of critical texts). For the patriots a

strong point of classical literature is knowledge it contains, its explanatory potential.

The headlines of the articles published in "Nash Sovremennik" ("Our Contemporary") also prove literocentrism of their writers' thinking: "One who'll read it to the end will save himself...", "Lessons of philology", "Enlightener", "Gogol's sermon is heard today", "A wise man from Kliashev", "A real teacher", "Russian lessons by Vadim Kozhinov", etc.

Conversations about crisis of literocentrism have acquired the status of fashionable ones in liberal criticism. Destroying a paradigm of officialese criticism, the "liberals" should seemingly have readjusted the pattern of their activity the way it could release authoritarianism of each constituent part of this pattern (for more details see (Govorukhina, 2012)). However, with all the obvious changes in the structure of a critical activity itself, criticism of liberal magazines still sticks to literocentric guidelines.

If interpretation is an answer to a question, then literocentric interpretation is, firstly, interpretation caused by the need for answers, and, secondly, the one that is based on the idea that it is literature that knows the answers. The difference between "patriotic" literocentrism and "liberal" one is considered worth mentioning. As for liberal literocentrism, it neither extends the answer to all ones, regarding it generally valid, nor shapes it in the form of imperative. The issue of literocentrism here is the issue of resources of cognition, possibilities of cognition by a word.

Literal criticism at the turn of the XX-XXI centuries shows its enhanced attention to the author (the experience of self-consciousness and world awareness), characters and their psychological state, world-view and self-comprehension. A critic together with numerous readers is in the situation when it is necessary to cognize the world and oneself without basing on ideology.

In this case critical texts, focusing upon "Who am I?" question, turn out to be guiding for non-professional readers, teaching them to understand (not to live). A critic's "question" determines the aspect of analysis and a text's plane of content to be actualized. A question significant for criticism at the turn of the centuries is "What are the ways of survival/existence in the situation of crisis/radical turn/end?" (Govorukhina, 2012).

A tendency to suggest writers and critics that they should ignore an opportunity to exert influence on readers can be also called literocentric. P. Basinskii defines such criticism as callous. He regrets that a cold, lifeless literary game has become a perspective norm while a higher degree of heartiness is under suspicion as we don't trust it (Basinskii, 2000).

We argue that literocentrism can be viewed not only as a property of reading / interpreting a text but a characteristic feature of a contemporary's cognition of a non-textual reality as a textual one. In this regard N. Ivanova, one of the most authoritative liberal critics who tends to understand herself, the world, and a field of interpretation as a literary text, is literocentric. While interviewed by M. Edelstein, she confesses that she decodes people, playing certain roles in politics and literature, as characters. Thus literature and social life for her are an integral text (Ivanova, 2006, 338).

Liberal critics' literocentrism is, to our mind, a feature of a modern reader's catastrophic thinking, aiming at search / reading for the answers in literature (See (Miesen, 2003) about reading as a planned act).

Being a phenomenon that washes out the total / totalitarian / authoritarian on principal, postmodernism is far from being naturally related to literocentrism. Moreover, it develops in its fight with literocentrism. At the same time postmodern criticism can be comprehended as a literocentric one.

The concept of literocentrism is connected with the concept of power, power of discourse. That makes it possible to define literocentrism as a system of such status-and-role relations between a writer and a reader when one experiences either conscious or subconscious symbolic compulsion via fictionally coded patterns of the world-view, world-perception, world-understanding, as well as via vectors of values and behavior, and, consequently, a symbolic subordination (understood as perception of these patterns).

V. Kuritsyn, the most famous Russian critic-postmodernist, is also literocentric while arguing that content decoding in search for the intention is worthless as it is a way of organizing an utterance but not the plane of content (in which there might be the totality) that serves the source of intention (Kuritsyn, 1995). He doesn't reflex the phenomenon of the totality of form, context, and strategies of postmodern text production. The term of strategy applied to V. Kuritsyn's activity is very precise due to its conceptual idea of process when the process of conceptualization and text production is more important than the result.

Prohibition against a writer's authority as well as translating and strengthening this knowledge by a critic, or, in other words, prohibition against the moment of intentionality is being formed in postmodern criticism. However, the forms of fight with the total are not limited to this. The fight with the total acquires the feature of totality itself, thus generating its own powerful intention of necessity to resist uttered truth. Isn't it a variant of true knowledge?

In postmodern critics' texts we face the effect of speaking silence as a postmodern critic's silence is not informative but formative (Epstein, 2005). It forms such reader's guidelines for the text perception which activate independence, individuality, and freedom of interpretation but

not the trust to the knowledge he / she gets in ready imperatives. Isn't it a literocentric project?

There are two acts in critical literary activity. These are primary interpretation in the dialogue with the text and secondary interpretation in the form of a critical text. A postmodernist considers the stage of text production to be the most important one as it is here where fiction potency aimed at the fight with the total is realized. As for the first interpretation, it can be quite traditional, and the guidelines, determining the literary work's understanding, can be quite literocentric. This is proved by the critics' slips of tongue, or by discursively contradictory parts.

For example, in his comments "Mozhno bant zaviizat' – na zvezde" ("One can tie a bow – on a star") V. Kuritsyn regrets the young audience's preference of Igor Irten'ev to Aleksandr Eremenko and destruction of former hierarchy with Venedikt Erofeev and Aleksandr Eremenko at the top (Kuritsyn, 1994). In his article "Velikie mify i skromnye dekonstruktsii" ("Great myths and modest deconstructions"), which is not a postmodern one, he notes that great Russian literature is spiritual and supported by truth as it is some absolute sense, sense in general, light and holiness on principal, some energy of truth, Logos proper. It is an ideal, closed, and perfect substance with absolute authority. The text doesn't not simply spawn the attitude to the "reality" or some fragments of "reality"; it spawns the world harmony – balance of sin, retribution and God's viewpoint (Kuritsyn, 1996).

According to anti-total guideline, in postmodern criticism a subject of knowledge turns out to be displaced. The mechanism of production, potency of knowledge, which is easily interchanged by a recipient's function of content production, takes its place. An alternative literocentric pattern is created, all its main components and segments functioning. These are a recipient in the role of an author, a context,

silence, gestures, pre-textual space which is conceptualized, filled with meaning, and a total energy gaining a powerful suggestive translating) force.

The “new criticism of the noughties” nomination contains a pretension to discovery of a new generation of professional readers going into a literary fight for “symbolic capital” (M. Berg’s term). This discovery was announced by R. Senchin, a Russian writer and critic, in his anthology “Novaia russkaia kritika. Nulevye gody” (“New Russian criticism. The noughties”) (New..., 2009). In his introduction to the articles of the “young” he mentioned the otherness of their critical thinking. New critics’ names are entered on a list of the classics of critical literary thought (N. Dobroliubov, N. Chernyshevskii, D. Pisarev, V. Kozhinov, et al.). He states that to say the least of it they lived within the period of the golden age of critical literary thought that could be probably compared with the 60-ties of the XIX century, the 60-ties of the XX century (New..., 2009). The 60-ties of the XIX and XX centuries, mentioned by R. Senchin, are the time of the peaks of literocentrism. Drawing parallels with these periods is justified. According to the author, a serious attitude to a work of literary art, a wish to read books by the writers who have become masters of minds again, a desire to help people live with purpose are typical characteristic features of a new generation of critics (New..., 2009). M. Antonicheva in her article “O tendentsioznosti v literaturnoi kritike” (“On tendentiousness in literary criticism”) repeats V. Belinsky’s words: “Criticism should educate a reader who is its addressee” (Antonicheva, 2006). The latter implies some translated knowledge.

R. Senchin views literocentrism and criticocentrism as a Russian reader’s mental need and considers them to be a natural order of things. In the situation of a lesser attention to a word a

“new” criticism regrets the lost, dreams and feels nostalgic for ideal times when a writer’s word and criticism will become authoritative.

Young criticism focuses upon the aspect of suggestion, questions the issues of renewal of mechanisms of non-imperative translation of meaning. It is no coincidence that the word “message” is often used in modern criticism. It conveys the conceptual meanings of idea, piece of news, sermon, and reference and, thus, is focused on a recipient. The fact that most critical texts, published by young critics, are retellings of the plots with the emphasis on key points is assignable.

### Conclusion

At the turn of the XX-XXI centuries an elitist writer changed into an intellectual whose task is neither educate nor prophesy. Literature is conscious of incompleteness and infinity of understanding, and, thus, the impossibility to fully cognize objects and phenomena, give their precise definitions, express them in words. In this regard it is anti-literocentric. Nevertheless, literary criticism has adjusted to this transformation neither instrumentally nor gnoseologically, although it has stated this. The reasons for “lagging behind” could be the following ones.

Inertia of perception of literature as something greater than only literature, as sermon and teaching, something that postmodernism failed to completely destroy.

Nostalgia for the soviet past which was topical in the 1990-s and is important nowadays. The feeling of time in meta-criticism of these days is the following: the present is crisis, the future is unpromising. Under such circumstances critical vision is focused upon the soviet past, associated with the lost authoritative status. Recall of former merits can be defined as one as the forms of nostalgia that enables to ease the crisis of self-identity.

Literocentrism is supported by the nature of literary criticism itself. Interpretation is an answer to a question which is of current importance for both a critic and a great number of readers, a question which reflects the atmosphere of time. Literature is meant to be capable of either

giving or provoking answers. Critical activity, being a communicative act, is aimed at a reader. This activity is pragmatically designed. Thus, critical discourse can be regarded as influencing consciousness. These features of criticism will always support literocentrism in a varying degree.

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## Литературоцентризм современной критики

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*Статья доказывает тезис о литературоцентричности критического мышления современного профессионального читателя, что противоречит традиционному восприятию литературной ситуации конца XX – начала XXI века как периода кризиса литературоцентризма. Материал данной статьи – литературная критика либеральных и патриотических журналов, постмодернистская критика, новая критика 2000-х годов. В каждой из них обнаруживаются признаки литературоцентричности: установка на вычитывание в художественном тексте актуальных ответов, истин, трансляция этих ответов читателю в виде моделей поведения/мышления, авторитет классики и другие. На рубеже XX–XXI веков элитарный писатель превратился в интеллектуала, в задачу которого не входит учить и пророчествовать. Литература, особенно поэзия, осознает незавершенность понимания. Но литературная критика, констатируя это, не изменилась ни инструментально, ни гносеологически.*

*Ключевые слова: литературоцентризм, кризис литературоцентризма, литературная критика, либеральные и патриотические журналы/критика, постмодернистская критика.*

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