

Methodology in Literary Discourse Analysis: Issues and Problematics

المنهج في تحليل الخطاب الأدبي : القضايا والإشكالات

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Abstract:

This research paper examines the most prominent issues and problematics that limit the effectiveness and efficacy of methodological approaches in analysing literary discourse. These problems are linked, on the one hand, to the methodology's epistemological philosophy, procedural tools, and terminological concepts. On the other hand, they are associated with the practical application that tests the effectiveness and efficiency of said methodology.

Keywords: Issues, Problematics, Methodology, Critical Practice, Literary Discourse

ملخص البحث :

يقف الدارس في هذه الورقة البحثية على أبرز القضايا والإشكالات التي تحد من فاعلية المنهج ونجاعته في تحليل الخطاب الأدبي، وهذه الإشكالات ترتبط من جهة بالمنهج في فلسفته المعرفية وأدواته الإجرائية وفي مفاهيمه الاصطلاحية، وترتبط من جهة أخرى بالممارسة العملية التي تختبر فاعلية ونجاعة ذلك المنهج.

الكلمات المفتاحية: القضايا، الإشكالات، المنهج، الممارسة النقدية، الخطاب الأدبي.

Introduction

Critics face numerous issues and problems when applying methodological approaches to literary discourse, which have significantly impacted the effectiveness of these methods in terms of their ability to penetrate the depths of literary works. These issues and their accompanying multifaceted problems are primarily related to a central cause: these methodologies are imbued with a culture foreign to the mind that created the literary discourse. In this study, we will examine the most prominent of these issues and the problematics they have raised, defining their nature and causes.

1. Concepts and Terminology

Before examining the issues and problematics associated with applying methodologies in the field of literary studies, it is beneficial to clarify some concepts that will aid in understanding the nature of these issues and problematics.

A. Methodology

We are not particularly concerned with the linguistic definition of methodology, but rather with its terminological significance and the epistemological trajectories associated with this meaning until it became an established concept in its application to the field of humanities and literary studies, with diverse analytical approaches.

Initially, the terminological meaning of methodology was associated with the logical current, denoting "the mental means and procedures according to logical boundaries that lead to specific results" (1). Here, methodology was linked to the rationalist tendency advocated by the Greeks, then adopted by Islamic culture, and continued until the Renaissance.

During the Renaissance, the scientific tendency began to rise to prominence. This tendency does not rely solely on reason to derive knowledge but also inclines towards experimentation. From the marriage of these two tendencies, scientists began to test and verify knowledge. Methodology came to be defined as "a system of tools and concepts by which rules are established and paths and routes are clarified, governed by a theoretical and epistemological space that forms its womb and vital domain" (2), guiding the researcher to safe shores.

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This concept of methodology has become prevalent in the field of literary studies and scientific knowledge. In the realm of literary studies, it specifically deals with discussing literary issues and matters of creativity, their forms, and manifestations. To accomplish this task, it relies on an epistemological theory that defines its view of literature, on techniques and procedures that reflect the robustness of that theory and establishes for itself a terminological apparatus that defines and distinguishes it from other methodologies. The effectiveness of this methodology becomes apparent during practical critical application.

In summary, methodology is defined by three components: theory, technique, and terminology. A methodology cannot exist without these, nor can it ensure its vitality except through them, as they undergo constant modifications related to the transformations in theory and new terminology borrowed from other fields of knowledge. Methodologies within the same field may overlap, but this does not "upon correct examination, lead to confusion or distortion. There are common areas where methodologies are adjusted according to their successive discoveries, but there are also instances of overlap and divergence, primarily evident when multiple epistemological foundations differ. In these areas, two methodologies cannot converge if their epistemological foundations differ" (3).

B. Critical Practice

By this, we mean the practical application through the use of tools and procedures produced by the epistemological theory that establishes the methodology. This practical application serves as a test for that methodology, assessing its suitability, effectiveness, and responsiveness in analyzing literary discourse or any other form of discourse.

Such critical practice requires the critic to possess high methodological competence based on a conscious knowledge of the philosophical, epistemological, and aesthetic vision from which the methodology originates. "The extent of this awareness increases the effectiveness of the practice and its ability to overcome difficulties and misunderstandings when practically confronting literary discourse" (4). The critic's methodological competence is what makes their critical practice on literary texts effective and prevents them from falling into the pitfalls of superficial practice.

On the other hand, critical practice differs from methodology and theory, considering the latter two as "a set of logical rules or ideas in their complete form" (5). Critical practice, however, represents "a free interactive dynamic between the

critic and the literary text, followed by the deduction of laws specific to the aesthetics of this read text. This type of free reading is akin to innovation in the field of criticism because it explores new experiences and deduces new theories" (6).

From this perspective, critical practice has a profound impact on the effectiveness of the methodology and addressing its shortcomings, whether at the level of ideas or tools and mechanisms

C. Literary Discourse

Abdesalam Meseddi defines discourse as "creating a language from language" (7). This concept refers to the individual use of language, characterized by the element of creative ability that brings words to life after they have been depleted by the constraints and accumulations of usage. Therefore, understanding the expressive possibilities of that language allows the poet to utilize them in expressing their poetic experience in its warmth, depth, internality, and complexity. The creator's awareness of the language's expressive possibilities leads to new creative functions that differ from its familiar usage, "producing a literary text in which all the constituent elements meld to form an artistic whole" (8).

While language is one of the foundations upon which literary discourse is built, the artistic foundation is of even greater importance than the level of artistic formation. "It has been a vehicle in the hands of creators, used by those who aspire to innovate the path of the literary pattern they engage with" (9). This artistic foundation may benefit from techniques of neighboring arts, especially elements of storytelling, narrative techniques, direction, synthesis, montage, and others, as well as from the dream's ability to discover and inspire the chaos of internal contradictions.

The artistic and linguistic factors are fundamental in constructing literary discourse. From them, "the orbits of the literary text are formed, intertwining to create its system. These orbits are subject to laws that make them weave the structure of the system from elements that carry its lifeblood and acquire its features. The laws of the system become the very laws that govern the orbits and control the precision of their meanings. This is all due to the text being a vision that extends to cover the foundation of the system from its smallest particles to its largest orbits" (10).

Undoubtedly, the interaction of linguistic and artistic factors in literary discourse requires the imagination of the creative mind to make that text integrated and harmonious, transforming it into "an intertwined forest of aesthetic questions that need a unique kind of adventure to conduct a secret dialogue with them, aiming to decipher their symbols, entanglements, complexities, and ambiguities" (11). If this is the case, confronting this discourse imposes a specificity related, on one hand, to the critical methodology in its philosophy and vision, which must achieve a considerable degree of freedom, flexibility, and tolerance for the method. On the other hand, it relates to the critic, who must have sufficient experience and the ability to venture into that confrontation—an adventure to enter that intertwined forest and navigate its rugged paths.

However, the application of critical methodology to literary discourse has faced many issues and problematics, which may prevent achieving the desired goal of analyzing literary discourse. Some of these issues and problematics may be related to the methodology and its foundational ideas, tools, and terminological apparatus, while others may be connected to the projection of the methodology's concepts and tools onto literary discourse.

2. Critique of Methodology in Literary Discourse Analysis

By critiquing the methodology, we mean examining the issues and problematics that arise from the incompatibility of the methodology—in its epistemological dimensions, procedural tools, and terminological concepts—with the nature of the literary phenomenon. This is because the methodology's approach in studying this phenomenon is to subject it to a set of strict rules and laws to reach specific results. However, literature, in its artistic and aesthetic specificity, often resists rigid rules and binding laws, making the relationship between literary discourse and methodology a tense one, with many obstacles preventing its resolution.

A. Secularization of the Study

The goal that critics aim for by applying methodologies to literary discourse is to bring their results closer to those of scientific studies in terms of objectivity and rigor. We perceive this call since the Russian Formalists advocated for it, and Structuralism later worked to achieve it. Thus, the methodology views the literary phenomenon as one that parallels the scientific phenomenon, subject to

experimentation in judging its results, with no room for any other way of determining those results. This puts the application of the methodology to literary discourse in a predicament when facing taste and aesthetic issues, which represent its most prominent characteristics. These issues are mercurial and cannot be constrained by controlling rules and laws. In this case, the methodology's approach to analyzing literary discourse becomes "monitoring the components of the text's body and the composition of this body, monitoring its health and illness, not its ugliness and beauty" (12).

This approach to studying literary discourse does not achieve the desired goal. Rather, it flaws the methodology and marks it as deficient, as it does not help in reaching the dark foci that hide behind the body of the text. Revealing these requires a refined intuitive sense because they are framed within the spiritualities of the text and its taste and aesthetic characteristics. This characteristic defies rules and the application of mechanical templating in analyzing literary discourse, a templating that can be found in both good and poor works alike.

The methodology's endeavor to secularize the study of the literary phenomenon turns it into "a body in which blood has frozen and arteries have hardened, losing its most important human characteristics: freedom, flexibility, and tolerance" (13). This is because achieving results from this approach in applying methodology to the literary phenomenon cannot serve this phenomenon, which does not align in its human nature with the zero distance between right and wrong, but rather "with the large distance in which colors multiply and differences are allowed" (14). We can explain this by saying that in studying different literary phenomena, it is difficult "to reach shared positions and acknowledge fixed characteristics, unlike in science where convergence can be achieved between information accepted by all" (15).

However, it is not beneficial for literary discourse analysis to reject these endeavours outright if we find in its elements that serve this analysis and aid in its effectiveness and efficiency. It would be desirable to "form a critical study with the principles of science and its logical foundations (Epistemology) specific to literary knowledge" (16). It seems to me that this would benefit literary criticism and its methodologies, preventing the fall into the abyss of scientific seduction in studying literary discourse, where methodologies become uniform measures without regard for the specificities of literary discourse in its uniqueness and particularity. This is merely a repetition of the same mistake that ancient rhetoric

fell into when it attempted to establish creativity rules and turned them into measures by which to gauge the degree of that creativity. This was a step that involved great danger because it separated the body of the creative work from its spirit, transforming the latter into a lifeless body that had departed from its soul.

B. Reception of Methodology

The reception of critical methodologies by Arab criticism and their application to literary discourse have raised many issues and problematics. These methodologies are imported from an environment different from the Arab one, and consequently, the concepts on which they are based are Western concepts produced by a different culture. Arab critics have either imported them as they are, like any other product, believing in their validity and effectiveness in light of the Arab mind's inability to produce concepts that reflect its identity and authenticity, or they have received them with a sense of the dominance and superiority of the conqueror, which motivated them to promote these concepts and praise their originators.

Unfortunately, this imported or promoted product did not pass through channels of deliberation and consideration to adapt it to suit the nature of the literary phenomenon it analyzes, unlike what the originators of these imported methodologies did in terms of modifications and revisions to make them compatible with their literary texts. This has led many critics in their studies to fall into the predicament of mechanical and stereotypical templating. Therefore, the least that can be said about their analyses is that they are "dry mechanical analyses, and often inappropriate (...) because they are extracted from a different environment" (17).

Critics, in their reception of critical methodologies, did not apply their judgment or review them before applying them to literary discourse. Rather, their main concern was to possess the tools and procedures of this methodology, which led them to fall into the trap of imitation that particularly affected the newly developed literary genres in literature such as the novel, theatre, and short story.

This action involves great danger, as we cannot accept with such innocence the importation of such methodologies. Even if these methodologies appear in the form of universal templates and rules, "they often hide social and political orientations that do not reveal themselves, concealed behind the scientific nature of the methodology, which makes them lose the breadth of universal cognitive authority. Rather, they are historical, and circumstantial, expressing a specific

orientation and artificially created as a tool possessing the symbolic ability to dominate. Therefore, they must be deconstructed and the latent and unspoken backgrounds within them must be highlighted" (18).

We believe that this approach in critics' reception of critical methodologies, which we previously emphasized the necessity of reviewing and making modifications to through the culture they adhere to, will transform their writings into genuine works unmarred by the disadvantages of ambiguity and complexity, and closer to the essence of literary discourse in its specificity that distinguishes it from other discourses produced by different cultures—cultures that have, in turn, produced those methodologies to analyze them.

Undoubtedly, the birth of these methodologies under different cultural conditions will carry the genetic imprint of their producer.

There is another issue associated with critics' reception of methodology and its application to literary discourse, which is starting from a predetermined methodology. This makes the study governed by a preconceived notion where priorities change in achieving the desired goal, making the methodology the end and the literary discourse the means. This is because the methodology is a product "at best, of a specific partial corpus that has assumed that rank and imposed itself on other research subjects, which are inevitably distinguished by specificities and qualitative values that resist conformity to defined templates" (19). The success of the methodology occurs when "the literary work chooses the methodology that suits it, and that methodology emerges after a genuine struggle in reading the literary work, analyzing it, and interpreting its dimensions" (20). This issue is connected to the critical practice of literary discourse, and therefore we consider it a practical problem that becomes more complex when the critic's knowledge of the literary work is limited.

Critical practice in employing these methodologies in literary works has revealed that the reality of this practice relies on the mechanisms and tools produced by Arab theoretical research, contrary to what is common in praising the theoretical research upon which the methodologies that scholars hum around are based.

C. Confusion of Terminology and Concepts

We can say that this question is one of the most frequently raised by scholars in their research and is considered one of the serious methodological

problems. It is connected, on one hand, to the epistemological theory on which the methodology is based, and on the other hand, to the practical application of this methodology. If the system of these concepts and terms is governed by ambiguity, confusion, and overlap, it deprives the methodology of its scientific character and exacerbates "the risks of methodological slippage at the level of applied study, and the chances of controlling the subject of study are reduced" (21). The impact of this problem on the reader is no less dangerous, as "it eliminates the communication that the language of the text undertakes, and spreads confusion in the reader's mind, which contradicts any scientific study" (22).

However, we notice that the impact of this problem varies in its extent because critics are not of equal competence in embodying the methodology. Their critical writings reveal stark differences in receiving the methodology, in terms of closeness or distance, conception and understanding.

What is particularly troubling in Arab critical studies is that we find both novice and senior scholars have not been spared in their works from the danger of this methodological approach. It has become evident "in their linguistic and intellectual elements that their authors have obscured these trends before the reader instead of shedding light on their essential characteristics under the name of modernizing Arab critical thought" (23). As a result, the reader found difficulty in understanding critical trends, which gave a poor impression of this reader's culture, who could not comprehend cultural elements from another culture.

Unfortunately, these critics justify their actions by claiming that "the Arab mind is still operating according to mechanisms and premises unable to assimilate these terms and critical methodologies that they disseminate in their critical studies" (24). In reality, such an approach shows contempt for the Arab mind and cultural arrogance on the part of these scholars, making critical practice in analyzing literary discourse a matter hindered by obstacles of our own making.

For all these reasons, we emphasize that these methodologies in Arab criticism will not be properly established unless there is a genuine review of the system of concepts and terms on which the methodology is based, according to mechanisms that ensure its proper use with precision and objectivity. The term should not appear alien in its connotation from our cultural perspective, nor should it be disconnected from the meaning it acquired in its original context. If the methodology is free from all of this, it would be one of the reasons for preventing methodological slippage and would spare the reader's mind from confusion in receiving the work. It would also negate all accusations against this

reader of being intellectually underestimated or culturally deficient in keeping up with these.

Such an action was not foreign to other cultures; the methodologies that appeared in Europe were not applied uniformly. "They were adapted and developed to suit the texts to which they would be applied and the artistic taste of the people who create and read these texts" (25). This is similar to what happened in the reception of reader-response theory, where German culture received it under the name of reception theory (with Jauss), French culture as the pleasure of the text (with Barthes), and British and American cultures received this theory under the name of reader-response criticism.

In conclusion, these problems and others associated with applying the methodology to literary discourse have their main source in the fact that this methodology is imported. Consequently, analyzing literary discourse according to a methodology produced by a culture different from the culture connected to the creative product will be fraught with many obstacles. It is unreasonable to measure literary discourse by artistic values from the products of Western culture, which has produced critical works described as either stereotypical, ambiguous, or complex unless we re-adapt these artistic values to suit the nature of Arabic texts and align with the general popular artistic taste that produces and reads these texts.

Footnotes :

1. Salah Fadl, *In Literary Criticism*, Publications of the Arab Writers Union, Damascus, no date, 2007, p. 7.
2. Mohamed Naser Al-Ajimi, *Modern Arabic Criticism and Western Critical Schools*, Mohamed Ali El Hami Publishing and Distribution, Sfax, Tunisia, 1st ed., 1998, p. 490.
3. Salah Fadl, p. 12.
4. See: Ibrahim Al-Saafin, Khalil Al-Sheikh, *Methods of Modern Literary Criticism*, Al-Quds Open University Publications, Amman, Jordan, 1st ed., 1997, p. B.
5. Abdul Karim Al-Kurdi, *Critique of Method in Literary Studies*, Al-Adab Library, Cairo, no date, 2014, p. 18. Ibid., p. N.

6. Abdul Salam Al-Masdi, *Criticism and Modernity with a Bibliographic Guide*, Al-Tali'a Publishing and Printing House, Beirut, 1st ed., 1983, p. 57.
7. Adnan Hussein Qasem, *The Structural Stylistic Trend in Arabic Poetry Criticism*, Ibn Kathir Publishing House, Damascus, Beirut, 1st ed., 1992, p. 159.
8. Abdul Salam Al-Masdi, *Criticism and Modernity*, p. 14.
9. Adnan Hussein Qasem, *The Structural Stylistic Trend in Arabic Poetry Criticism*, p. 160.
10. Mohamed Saber Obeid, *The Aesthetic Adventure of the Poetic Text*, Modern Books World, 1st ed., 2008, p. 13.
11. Abdul Karim Al-Kurdi, *Critique of Method in Literary Studies*, p. 178.
12. Ibid., p. 181.
13. Ibid., p. N.
14. Enric Anderson Embert, *Methods of Literary Criticism*, trans. Taher Ahmed Al-Makki, Al-Adab Library, Cairo, no date, 1991, p. 48.
15. Ibid., p. 16.
16. Abdul Karim Al-Kurdi, *Critique of Method in Literary Studies*, p. 161.
17. Mohamed Naser Al-Ajimi, *Modern Arabic Criticism and Western Critical Schools*, p. 8.
18. Ibid., p. N.
19. Ibrahim Al-Saafin, Khalil Al-Sheikh, *Methods of Modern Literary Criticism*, p. B.

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