

## **MEDIA CRITICISM AS A FORM OF LITERARY JOURNALISM: UPDATING THEORETICAL APPROACHES TO A META-GENRE**

## **МЕДИАКРИТИКА КАК ФОРМАТ АВТОРСКОЙ ЖУРНАЛИСТИКИ: ОБНОВЛЕНИЕ ТЕОРЕТИЧЕСКИХ ПОДХОДОВ К МЕТАЖАНРУ**

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*This paper attempts to analyze current practices of literary journalism, manifest in the format of a column as its meta-genre, and media criticism as its global content. Critics mainly focus on*

*media products from such creative industries as modern television, theatre, cinema, as well as on literature and the work of cultural institutions. One of the most prominent journalists concerned with these issues is Tatyana Moskvina. The paper draws attention especially to a definition of literary journalism as a community of creative personalities with different professional backgrounds, working on staff or as freelancers, who are concerned with the most pressing issues and give their reviews in unconventional creative genres.*

**Key words:** *meta-genre, literary journalism, column writing, column, media criticism, tradition, tone.*

*В данной статье предпринята попытка анализа практик современной авторской журналистики, метажанром которой является колонка, а глобальным контентом — медиакритика. Выявлены основные темы критики, связанной именно с медиа — критики искусства современного телевидения, театра, кинематографа, литературы, а также деятельности учреждений культуры. Наиболее интересным журналистом, в поле зрения которого находятся перечисленные проблемы, является Татьяна Москвина. Особый акцент в статье сделан на определении понятия авторской журналистики, которая представляет собой сообщество творческих личностей, получивших разные профессии, работающих постоянно либо приглашенных к сотрудничеству, пишущих отклики на злобу дня, комментирующих события, в неканонических, созданных собственной мыслью и талантом, жанрах.*

**Ключевые слова:** *метажанр, авторская журналистика, колумнистика, колонка, медиакритика, традиция, тональность.*

## **Introduction**

Recently, we have witnessed an increasing interest in the opinions published in periodicals by authors who are not necessarily full-time staff members. To give one example, half of the thirty columnists writing for “Gazeta.ru” are journalists working for other media establishments, while just a few of the on-staff columnists have a degree in journalism. This leads us to define literary journalism as a community of creative personalities with different professional backgrounds, working on staff or as freelancers, who are concerned with the most pressing issues and publish their reviews in unconventional creative genres. Although the emergence of new genres is a set trend, all the new literary genres center around a personal column – a meta-genre model, which has gained in popularity, seen a growth in dedicated column inches, and is assuming a place in the system of journalistic genres. The personal column today is, largely, a platform to exercise freedom of critical thought and air opinions on an array of issues, including opinions about a TV media product.

This paper aims to examine practices of literary journalism. To meet this end, it will consider the ratio of traditions to innovations in literary journalism, present the results of discourse analysis of critical content as textual space, identify the platforms amenable to originality and creative freedom for media critics, and discuss the ways they prioritize choice of genre.

## **Methodology**

This research is aimed at analyzing genres of literary journalism. Choosing the most effective method to analyze these genres is a multi-step endeavor. Each method must be weighted in order to

establish its methodological value in journalistic research. The use of a traditional method of comparative analysis allows us to examine how new journalistic genres appear by revealing both the regulatory mechanisms that differentiate genres and the means of transforming their structure. It also reveals the flexibility of journalistic genres, which, on the one hand, allows the journalist to concentrate on certain aspects of the reality they depict and, on the other hand, takes into account response patterns of particular audiences perceiving a media text. The major content of the latter are critical reviews of modern media practices from television, theatre, and cinema. The comparative method is a research tool used to analyze the specific genres of media criticism represented in opinion columns, which has become a mainstay of literary journalism.

## **Deliverables**

Today, opinion columns are found in many periodicals. However, not every edition can boast of professionalism in regard to their columnists. The study analyzed 600 writings published by the media critic Tatiana Moskvina in the newspaper “Argumenti Nedeli” over the last 10 years (the editor’s column has come out regularly since 2006). This analysis covers all of the texts published in Moskvina’s column over the past decade (2006–2016). K. Krippendorf refers to this method as systematic sampling (Krippendorf, 1980: 53). Qualitative analysis was applied to 600 texts, showing changes in the representation of the three most frequent issues raised in the sampling, i.e. cinema, theatre, and management of cultural institutions. The choice of articles was determined by a wish to find the most typical topics of media criticism. Special attention was given to articles about cultural events held in St. Petersburg.

Table 1

## Topics in Moskvina's media criticism: results of content analysis

Year	Topics of Publications						Personalities in Culture (Interviews, Sketches, Obituaries)
	Theatre (First Night Reviews, Festivals, Awards)	Literature (New Releases, Awards)	Cinema, Television (New films)	Cultural Issues (Restoration of Architecture and its Outcomes)	Cultural Institutions	Officials	
2006	7	5	8	4	2	4	10
2007	7	10	10	6	3	3	12
2008	9	6	10	3	10	5	10
2009	8	9	8	6	7	8	13
2010	8	8	9	6	8	9	12
2011	9	8	8	5	9	11	10
2012	8	6	8	5	8	12	7
2013	7	7	6	7	10	12	5
2014	6	8	6	6	10	13	6
2015	9	5	9	5	11	14	4
2016	8	9	8	4	7	16	5
<b>Total</b>	86	81	90	57	85	107	94

The study reveals that certain issues in culture, in particular the behavior of officials and corruption in cultural institutions, are increasingly becoming the focus of Moskvina's relentless eye.

The content focuses on five areas: cultural institutions (85 stories published by T. Moskvina in her column), theatre (86), cinema and television (90), literature (81), criticism of officials and outcomes of restoration of cultural monuments (164), an interview or a story about a personality in culture (94). Five hundred out of six hundred stories have headlines indicative of critical content and an ironic tone. The most remarkable feature of Moskvina's output is her attitude toward the critical tradition and the traditions of art (including television, theater, cinema, and literature). Stories featuring officials from cultural establishments are marked by a sarcastic tone and ceaseless disparagement typical of the Russian critical tradition.

## **Discussion**

The theory of media criticism as criticism of textual content distributed through traditional media platforms (press, radio, television) was developed by Aleksander Korochensky. The theoretical basis for defining the opinion column as a natural platform for media criticism was laid by Russian and American researchers of column writing, in particular, Vitaly Tretyakov, Bill Moyers, Yassen Zassoursky, and Sofia Yartseva.

Approaches to this question are varied. An unusual approach to media criticism is demonstrated by Denis McQuail. He views media criticism, on the one hand, as self-regulation, while on the other, he considers it as a tool to gain media accountability, ensuring social responsibility of the media to society (McQuail, 2013: 233).

McQuail underscores the fact that media criticism facilitates public trust in mass media. In her doctoral thesis on media criticism in the U.S.A., Prof. Doc. Susanne Fengler makes particular mention of the idea that media criticism is driven by public discontent and disappointment in media practices (Fengler, 2003: 818-819). Arthur Hayes concerns himself with the history of U.S. media criticism. He traces the historical development of press criticism since the 1880s, noting specific stages and the categories that marked them: muckrakers, journalism reviews, columnists and authors, television press critics, press councils, advocacy groups, scholars, ombudsmen, bloggers, and satirists (Hayes, 2008). According to B.L.R. Vande, L.A. Wenner, and B.E. Gronbeck, too, there are linguistic formats and tonalities that distinguish several types of media criticism. These include categorization by semiotic, genre, narrative, rhetorical, and ideological characteristics (Vande, Wenner, Gronbeck, 2004: 222-223).

### **Personal opinion column: evolution of methods and forms**

In 1721, James Franklin founded “The New-England Courant”, a newspaper marked by the humorous tone in letters-to-the-editor written by Benjamin Franklin. Under the pen name Silence Dogood, Benjamin Franklin sent in more than fourteen letters, which reveal features typical of the modern opinion column (Silence Dogood, No 1 from the New-England Courant, 1722). They were published bi-weekly, conveyed a full-fledge, if fictional, personality and clearly reflected some opinions of Franklin himself. It might be noted that the pen name “Mrs. Silence Dogood” sets a witty, joking tone; under the guise of a morally upstanding widow, Franklin mixes frivolous chatter with real social commentary. Franklin’s column

upheld the general spirit of the paper, which did not take aim at public officials but, rather, focused on the discussion of essential political issues. The stories, at once emotional, personalized and provocative, were also thought-provoking and controversial. Importantly, they aired ideas which were fundamental for the then population of the United States.

In the 1760s the press became politicized. According to Bernard Bailyn, this was driven by two factors: the Stamp Act of 1765 and, later, the Townshend Acts of 1767 (Beilin, 2010: 21). The latter was a set of laws that placed tax duties on certain goods imported to British colonies, e.g. paper and paint. Local publishers and printers considered the tax discriminatory, which led not only to protests in the colonies, but also hit the headlines. One of the responses to the new duties was “Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania”. This series of essays was published starting in 1767 in “The Boston Chronicle”. The series includes 12 letters written by John Dickinson, a lawyer and a legislator.

Remarkably, both Dickinson and Benjamin Franklin were able to create the image of an author and write on behalf of that persona. According to the historian Bernard Bailyn, such masks facilitated creative freedom (Beylin, 2010). A journalist hiding behind his pen name could air his stance, often different from official opinion, without the fear of political repression. Dickinson also needed a pseudonym. At the beginning of the series, his position towards officials in his native country [England] was moderate; however, it changed over time. At first, he called for coordinated actions among colonies in their fight against the new duties, including refusal to pay them. Later, his attitude towards the British government changed completely, giving way to harsh criticism. “Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania” even called for an armed rebellion.



John Dickinson's letters, along with the letters by Silence Dogood, made a significant impact on American history. Both series raised social and political issues, a farmer from Pennsylvania and a widow from Boston speak about the value of freedom. The two series of essays are marked, too, by important differences. Dickinson's letters are considerably longer. The first letter of Silence Dogood is almost two and a half times shorter than that of the Pennsylvania farmer (3,500 against 8,000 characters). The total number of letters in the latter series is smaller. Noticeably, the 1767-1768 series is entirely dedicated to political issues, in particular, the relationship between the colonies and their motherland, and how citizens of the New World might change that situation. As is repeatedly emphasized in his letters, the farmer regards freedom and labor as cardinal virtues. Interestingly, Dickinson used italics and capital letters to highlight the most essential concepts and ideas.

Thus, it is fair to say that by the second half of the 18th century newspapers of the New World started publishing series of letters that can be regarded as prototypes for modern opinion columns. This is evidenced by certain similarities between modern opinion columns and letters of Silence Dogood and the Pennsylvania farmer. First, despite their imaginary or false features, readers were informed about the personalities of the authors. The authors used them to set the audience in the right frame of mind in order to help them perceive ideas voiced by a person of certain outlook and social position. Second, both authors were not hesitant to communicate provocative ideas about political power and society. Their views contradicted those of London officials and, at the same time, banded together and united residents of the American colonies. Third, similarly to opinion columns, the letters appeared regularly. Fourth, their average size is comparable with that of modern opinion columns.

## Column writing in Russia

Russia welcomed the new genre in the early 1990s. Whatever the genre may be, once adopted in Russia, it will have its own style, i.e. a system of lexical, narrative, metric, and intonation patterns. In the period of normative conceptions about genres these characteristics were used to differentiate between and to define specific types of works. However, the situation changes when genres start to interact. Generally, in this case less stable genres are subject to a genre with more powerful stylistic characteristics. As B. Tomashevsky put it, “it is clear that we cannot build any solid and logical classification of genres... they are distinguished by a variety of characteristics and characteristics of one genre may appear to have an absolutely different nature than those of another one and, despite these, remain logically compatible... Genre studies have to be descriptive replacing the logical classification with an instrumental one” (Tomashevskiy, 1925: 165). Researchers face considerable difficulties when trying to define new genres since each particular case represents individual architectonic and conceptual features, making it impossible to resort to the concept of the genre in its conventional sense.

According to L. Chernets, a genre, as a category, has to perform two functions: first, to point at stable recurrent characteristics; second, to fulfill the task of genre classification (Chernets, 1982). To quote from Tomashevsky, “Specific groups or literary genres appear. What is characteristic of them is that devices of every genre are made of specific groupings of devices around these distinguishing devices or genre characteristics. It is possible to have numerous genre characteristics referring to any aspect of a literary work.” (Tomashevskiy, 1925: 161). With this in mind, it is reasonable to regard any text type as a particular genre if it has a clear-cut and a stable enough set of formal, functional or content-

related characteristics notwithstanding the lack of compulsory and stable correlations between the form and the content, the structure and the function (Esin, 2003).

In his study on how new genres evolve, V. Dneprov determined five facets in genre development (Dneprov, 1980):

- esthetic attitude to reality;
- span of reality;
- type of narrative (narration, description, dialogue);
- composition (the role of action, characters, circumstances);
- language (rhythm, intonation, stylistic devices, etc.).

These five levels determine the genre brackets, the correlation between thematic and stylistics structures. Genre scopes changing over the course of time constitute the subject of the historic-literary approach, while stable characteristics of a genre constitute the subject of historical poetics. Genre typology resorts to the method of reflection and genre function as units of classification. M. Bakhtin made the point that genres function as “forms of vision and understanding of certain aspects of the real world” (Bakhtin, 1979: 307). Despite the fact that genres are renewed and reborn, each genre, by its nature, has a foundation. This is what Bakhtin called the archetype. However, the genre “repertoire”, in journalism in particular, is subject to constant changes. This is where we witness two types of processes: the emergence of new speech genres and the transformation of archetypes of traditional genres. Through interaction the latter exchange stylistic and compositional devices creating meta-genres. In journalism, a meta-genre evolves on the principle of a spiral – the germination of elements of the new genre within the existing system of genres; its separation into an independent system of genres; stabilization of the system over a particular historical period; the climax of genre development; gradual accumulation of new characteristics

at the “rethinking” stage, and, finally, genre transformation. In journalism, transformation is the most productive type of processes in genre development as in this case it has to rise to certain set tasks. “The exploration of the epoch in any possible way – through family life, household, social interaction or psychological effort is inseparable from types of its reflection, i.e. basic approaches to genre architecture” (Medvedev, 1928: 182) Once the types (methods) of reflection are supplemented with the types (methods) of free and open communication of different opinions, journalism has a wider range of approaches to interpret the reality.

Perspectivism was the first philosophical school of thought to point out the necessary coexistence of numerous interpretations of the real world. Perspectivists valued individual interpretation and personal opinions, allowing for an infinite range of interpretations of reality, none of them claiming to be exceptional. These ideas were shared by G. Leibniz, F. Nietzsche, W. Dilthey, J. Ortega y Gasset and H. Vaihinger. As F. Nietzsche put it, “Rational thought is interpretation according to a scheme that we cannot throw off.” (Nietzsche, 2005: 186). An alteration in the scheme entails a change in interpretation, the phenomenon remains the same but acquires a different meaning. The interpretation schemes (or: “Interpretive schemes”?) are countless. The choice of a particular scheme is not driven by pursuit of truth, but a necessity to achieve mutual understanding (Nietzsche, 2005).

The majority of current media studies focus on issues of interpretation. Interpretation is regarded as an agenda-shaping technology. A. Garbuzniak states that “in today’s context of conflict and diverse socio-political environment, the interpretation function of Russian mass media is coming to the forefront” (Garbuzniak, 2015). It is difficult to argue this point. However, the paper cited does not make any mention of the interpreter as a vital creative

individual. According to Garbuzniak, interpretation is done by depersonalized mass media companies at home with effective technologies for communicating the ideas of public officials.

In our view, it is most fruitful to speak about interpretation within the context of literary journalism which manifests the importance of personal opinion, position, beliefs, and worldview of both the author and the reader. Literary journalism is a response to everyday challenges that may, to some extent, reflect an agenda, assimilate its scope of issues or reject it through criticism. Alexander Akhiezer, a renowned Russian political and cultural expert, sociologist and philosopher, underscores the importance of criticism, stating that historical inertia is indicative of a personal attachment to life experience; it causes constant lags in embracing innovation and, as a result, decreases the adaptive capacity of society when it has to constantly fit in with an ever-changing environment. Overcoming historical inertia is only possible through constant, massive criticism of the historical experience (Akhiezer, 1997).

Freedom of thought — one of the key achievements of democracy — is actualized in literary journalism. Being well-informed, educated, politically aware and pro-active as a journalist is the key to the freedom of opinion (Sherel, 1993). E. Vartanova, following D. Smythe, V. Mosco and A. Moles, concludes her study on the role of mass media in the economic market and the modern structure of free time with the opinion that “journalists are still very instrumental in creating media content” (Vartanova, 2009). Oddly, Bakhtin sounds up-to-date when he writes that “a journalist is, in the first place, a contemporary and has to be a contemporary who lives surrounded by issues that can only be solved here and now (or, at any rate, in the nearest future). The journalist takes part in a dialogue which has its end and its conclusion, may trigger action, may turn into empirical power. This is where ‘one’s own word’

is possible” (Bakhtin, 1979: 336). Moreover, literary journalism meets the needs of the audience that is not interested in content meant for consumers of mass culture. ‘Readers’ and ‘non-readers’ have different interests and demands. This difference has already triggered new research. The analysis of survey findings conducted by S. Plotnikov, a renowned Russian scholar in the psychology of reading, shows that, “The readers, unlike the non-readers, are capable of critical thinking, can grasp a full picture and determine conflicting relationships between events; the readers will get a more realistic picture of the situation and are faster in getting the right solution; the readers have a better memory and active imagination; they are more efficient speakers — their speech is emphatic, succinct, richer in vocabulary; they give more precise wording and write easily; they are more open to meet people and are pleasant to talk to; they need greater independence and internal freedom; they are more critical and independent in their judgments and behavior. To sum up, reading shapes the qualities of a most developed and socially valuable personality” (Plotnikov, 1999: 64-65). Preferences of a contemporary audience for journalistic content are affected by the fragmentation process. Content is differentiated according to two types of thinking — humanitarian and consumer — forming a dialectical opposition.

According to Bakhtin’s theory, thinking in the human sciences can be best represented as “transcription of a special kind of dialogue: the complex interrelations between the text (the object of study and reflection) and the created, framing context (questioning, refuting, and so forth) in which the scholar’s cognizing and evaluating thought takes place. This is the meeting of two texts — of the ready-made and the reactive text being created — and, consequently, the meeting of two subjects and two authors” (Bakhtin, 1979: 297).

Thinking in the humanities, in Bakhtin's view, is a dialogue of cultures and traditions which generates an audience's anticipation concerning a particular genre. As Bakhtin put it, "Truth is not born nor is it to be found inside the head of an individual person, it is born between people collectively searching for truth, in the process of their dialogic interaction." (Bakhtin, 1979: 299) The meta-genre in literary journalism reflects the ideology of civil society making the author and the reader equally important. Early in the 20th century, N. Rubakin developed a concept of the author's dependence on the reader's interpretation (Rubakin, 1925). The author focuses his attention on the relationship that a person or society has with the real world. Implicit communication creates communication space, the author and the reader are engaged in a dialogue that affects information behavior of the audience and textual strategies (stylistic devices, timeliness, polemical discourse).

Reading literary journalistic works requires creativity. The key feature of the author-reader communication is the focus on co-creation, which, if taken in the context of information space, touches upon a range of issues. One of the primary issues concerns the audience's attitude toward the author's text and possible limits of its interpretation. The author's text is not simply a set of words, it is an integral and complex set full of meaningful signs and images. The author's task is to unveil the meaning and help the reader understand the idea. To interpret the author's message correctly, the reader has to see the author in the text. It is not an object that is communicated in literary journalism — it is a thought and an emotional message that shapes the worldview and alters behavior. To quote from Karl Marx: "We have before us the objectified essential powers of man in the form of sensuous, alien, useful objects" (Marks, 1956: 301).

To understand the author is to reconstruct, to recreate his way of thinking objectified in the text. Science has already developed

effective guidelines to creative reading. Defining several levels of understanding an author's text, Shreyder suggests understanding of the author's intention as one of the principal levels, which explains the purpose of the text. Shreyder calls the author's intention inherent to the textual "in-depth semantics" and defines it as "a supreme goal of writing or delivering the text" (Shreyder, 1972). To delve deep into a text is to feel its uniqueness, created thanks to the unique individuality of the author, to see the personality behind the text, to find the author. As a result, a thoughtful reader will arrive at a framing context – this is what renders humanitarian thought two-dimensional and bi-subjective. The fundamental difference between humanitarian and consumer thought reflected in the information behavior of the audience, is traced in a popular quotation from Bakhtin: "And so behind each text stands a language system. Everything in the text that is repeated and reproduced, everything repeatable and reproducible, everything that can be repeated outside a given text conforms to this language system. But at the same time each text (as an utterance) is individual, unique, and unrepeatable, and herein lies its entire significance (its plan, the purpose for which it was created). This is something in the text that refers to truth, veracity, kindness, beauty, history" (Bakhtin, 1979: 300).

Characteristic features of a literary media text are not only determined by the information behavior of the audience, but also by genre traditions of international print media, e.g. the term describing a section of a newspaper page may extend to include the name of the new genre. For instance, the early 19th century welcomed the genre of *feuilleton* and the new genre of an opinion column emerged at the turn of the 21st century gradually replacing the traditional lead story (the leader) – an article, which, as a rule, was anonymous and promoted the political program of the majority party. A number of



scholars suppose that the genre of the “anonymous leader” is no longer relevant (Bobkov, 2005).

The essence of any tradition lies in its constant evolution, alteration at every new turn of history. If there is no change, no progress, there is no tradition — this is what constitutes its nature and has to be taken into account. Therefore, the most effective definitions of tradition point at its dynamic nature and emphasize its constant evolution. It is no coincidence that in recent theoretical as well as historical and literary studies concerned with continuity, the preference is given to the definition by A. Spirkin, who suggests that “tradition in its general philosophical sense is a type of relationship between the successive stages of the evolving object, including culture, when the old turns into the new and performs effectively in it” (Spirkin, 1980: 8). It is fair to say that this definition appropriately reflects the nature of tradition and seems the most promising for further research as, primarily, “here progress is interpreted as the basis, the force of nature that gives life to tradition” (Kamensky, 1982: 204). Defining tradition as “selection, interpretation, transfer and evolution of the historical artistic experience”, Kamensky proceeds from the assumption that tradition rests upon the dialectical unity of the historically stable and the evolving, the dynamic (Kamensky, 1982: 206). Similarly to Spirkin’s definition, the emphasis is placed on the dynamic character of tradition.

In his concept of tradition a German literary scholar R. Weimann considers dynamics as a major attribute of tradition. This is the cornerstone of his theory, which regards tradition as “a category of attitude indicative of the historical development”. “Tradition is something that is adopted and, as something that is subject to change, it changes the creative work of those who have adopted traditional images” (Veyman, 1975: 48). This is what, according to Weimann, makes great traditions eternal.

The present study of genre renewal in journalism is based upon Bakhtin's theoretical principals, defining tradition of genre renewal as "a representative of creative memory", capable of regeneration and acquisition of new properties in response to the changing times and, at the same time, preserving the archetype.

According to N. Leiderman, the core function of the genre is "a form of cognition that constitutes a new step in the development of modern artistic consciousness" (Leiderman, 1982: 126). As the genre is regarded as a form of the author's consciousness, Leiderman acknowledges that creative individuality affects genre development. If the genre is consistent with a certain level of artistic cognition of reality and has accumulated certain artistic knowledge about the modern "human world", it, as Leiderman argues, sets a genre trend which accelerates, gains momentum and sidelines other genres.

M. Gasparov claims that "To create a new genre is to confirm that certain forms utilize certain topics and use a set of feelings and thoughts to establish a firm relationship between them" (Gasparov, 1978: 203). If we apply this algorithm to literary journalism, we can conclude that a new genre is created by a vivid, talented, unbiased author. Bakhtin considered chronotopes as key determinants of the genre. Potebnya, Leiderman, and Chernets conclude that new genre forms are modifications of archetypes. Leiderman distinguishes between a genre and a genre model. He suggests that a genre should belong to the category of classification, whereas a genre model should be regarded as a factor of text formation. Therefore, a genre model functions as a transformation.

Transformations take place when some characteristics of the genre model appear to be less stable as a result of bringing together several models, discarding dominant genre-specific characteristics of the model, mismatches between elements of genre invariants, emphasis of certain characteristics of the basic genre model, and reductions of

genre models. Hence, a new literary genre is a type of writing formed by the transformation of the invariant genre structure or several such structures resulting in an unconventional and often unique, non-reproducible genre definition. In each individual case, new genres appear in accordance with the author's intention. However, as is the case with any abstract entity, a meta-genre has structural components required for any modification. As regards a literary genre, this is a personal position, personal opinion, architectonics of the text, inter-textuality, super-textual elements (headlines, sub headlines).

The present study of literary genres is based on the structural approach and regards a meta-genre as a model that has accumulated conventional characteristics of other genres. For instance, an opinion column might develop new genre characteristics of a review, a commentary, a round-up, a letter, a lampoon, or a feuilleton. The trend for convergence of each genre invariants provides additional capacity for the interpretation of an event. Giving his opinion and stating his position, the author opens the dialogue with the reader. In the dialogue, the person "invests his entire self in discourse, and this discourse enters into the dialogic fabric of human life, into the world symposium" (Bakhtin, 1979: 126). Inter-textuality of the column makes it possible to analyze how particular authors affect the formation of the meta-genre.

Choosing the style is a step that precedes text writing, however, each text modifies its genre and, as a result, a genre model is just a work material. From this dynamic position a genre may be defined as a functional category. To avoid the mistake of regarding a certain text of a particular epoch as an "ideal text" dependant on the "meta-text", i.e. on the whim of a literary scholar, Leiderman suggests considering a genre a category of classification which refers to reading, whereas a genre model is regarded as a text-forming factor (Leiderman, 1982).

Focusing on the meta-genre, it is necessary to refer to the “Theory of Literature”, a book by R. Wellek and A. Warre (Wellek, Warre, 1979), who consider the classics of literary scholarship. As the authors suggest, “Genre should be conceived, we think, as a grouping of literary works based, theoretically, upon both outer form (specific meter or structure) and also upon inner form (attitude, tone, purpose – more crudely, subject and audience)” (Wellek, Warre, 1979). “Outer” and “inner” structures of the meta-genre make up genre-specific characteristics. For the column these are an appropriate size (4,000 characters), structure (composition), emotionality (mood, attitude), constructive criticism (intention). Hence, the elements of the meta-genre structure: critical tone, explicit/implicit attitude, object of criticism, and emotional intensity.

### **Literary journalism: esthetics of critical thought**

A text with critical semantics will use irony as an esthetic principle. Linguists define irony as “the use of a word, a word combination or a sentence so that the intended meaning of a statement contradicts the literary (check: is the word “literal”?) meaning of the words to express criticism or evaluation” (Kuznets, 1960: 38). The author always makes it clear that his irony does not only reveal criticism, but also his “life stance” – an observation made by Plato thousands of years ago. Irony makes the author unobtrusive and non-judgemental – features necessary to communicate with the modern reader.

An analysis of the genre model of literary journalism reveals that the mega-genre is the most effective form for thoughtful individuals to communicate opinions, ideas, attitudes, and life stance to a thoughtful audience who consider them interesting personalities.

As history shows, the interpretation of reality in an anonymous, depersonalized text fails to rally the audience's confidence. Interpreting the situation from a personal perspective, evaluativity, a critical tone – this is what constitutes the archetype of the genre. Texts published on the allocated space of a newspaper page await the reader who might be unaware of such genre names as *feuilleton*, review, round-up, and the like. The column is sure to become part of the reader's thesaurus and the theory of journalistic genres as a meaningful name of a well-established, stable group of texts with the stated characteristics.

The present study is particularly interested in the sociological explanation of the popularity of media criticism. According to one sociologist, such content gains a vast amount of popularity when the society “is in doubt, when old values are shattering and new values are just emerging” (Shreyder, 1972: 67). M. Walzer suggests that social criticism takes all these forms – political censure, moral indictment, skeptical question, satiric comment, angry prophecy, and utopian speculation (Uolcer, 1999: 332).

Russian and international scholars in psychology (V. Vilunas, L. Vygotsky, B. Dodonov, A. Leontiev, P. Simonov, P. Fraisse, et. al.) provide a conceptual vision of the display of emotions in communication. This helps the addressee grasp the addressor's opinion, accept a particular point of view, make a choice, etc. Emotion is a psychological category, which, taken on the linguistic level, transforms into emotionality or the tone of the text. The tone of the text is the author's emotional attitude to an event, a process, or a phenomenon, i.e. to reality. The tone of the text as well as nomination, ideologeme, evaluativity, and interpretation are text-forming categories of the powerful discourse of criticism.

Widening the scope of N. Klushina's definition, it should be emphasized that media criticism in regard to journalism is not

simply a paradigm of the author's strategies, but also a set of tactics forming genre invariants (Klushina, 2008). The notion of the author's strategy appeared in Russian scholarly writings at the very beginning of the 21st century within narrative and reception studies (Tiupa, 2003), then made its way into narrative discourse analysis and, later, into the research on the author's thinking (Osmukhina, 2014).

The strategy depends on the ultimate goal of communication and aims to reach the suspended target. During communication the goal is mediated by specific tasks, which condition the choice of speech tactics within the chosen strategy. The tactics are taken through conversational turns (Lanskikh, 2008).

Communication strategies and tactics used in media criticism provide promising grounds for further research. Such an approach, on the one hand, broadens scientific beliefs about "verbal behavior of individuals in different types of discourse" (Kiselev, 2012), while, on the other, it allows researchers to determine the specifics of critical media texts. Despite a substantial amount of interesting data that has accumulated over the two decades, there has been no research on literary strategies deployed by media critics. In this regard, it would be of exceptional interest to do a study of writings by Tatiana Moskvina in order to delineate a clear-cut authorial position expressed in strategies, which, as O. Issers suggests, represent a set of speech actions necessary to reach the goal of communication (Issers, 2006). Among them a special mention should be made of self-representation that allows a media critic to express his or her personality.

A study of 600 writings reveals that commercialization and westernization affecting modern theatre and cinema are the factors that negatively impact the level of national culture. In most cases a new film, TV series, theatre play or book do not go unnoticed and

receive critical reviews by T. Moskvina with her personal evaluation. The critic gives an overview of the plot, discusses the work of the film director and the actors, and provides her personal assessment of the work's quality. As is often the case, meaningful analysis by a journalist facilitates better understanding of a given creative work, raises philosophical issues and broadens audience outlook.

According to Moskvina, the mission of the media critic is to steer the reader through the cultural environment. She believes that it is the critic who has to help the reader navigate through a myriad of new films, TV series, theatrical performances, and books. Moskvina calls out negative cultural trends, which are distributed in four groups: television, theater, cinema, and literature.

The low quality of TV products has serious consequences for society. Moskvina comments on the unjustifiably large number of versions of American films and game shows on Russian night-time television. This, in turn, raises the question of why the country needs TV and all its accessories: TV listings, satellites, extra power consumption, investments of money and time. Moskvina expresses the concern that such parodies of the West impoverish national culture, which is already at a low ebb due to copyism and a lack of original creative work. She believes that copying foreign TV format is equivalent to stealing. We will call this problem westernization.

The introduction to each "Petersburg – Channel 5" broadcast in 2013 went, "Our Channel Turns 75". In her breakdown of the title, Moskvina capitalizes the word 'OUR' and sarcastically invites the channel management to show some programs from the archive if it still identifies the channel with the times when St. Petersburg was called Leningrad, since the "WE" mentality of Soviet communism is at variance with the channel's dense western programming. Among the problems of modern Russian television, the media critic mentions westernization, a lack of due reverence for the cultural

heritage of TV channels, and ignorance and indifference on the part of TV management as regards centrally important cultural events.

In her discussion of the cinema, the author bemoans the difficulties of choosing a title for a new film. The choice is difficult not only because of the abundance of films and titles. The major problem is, as Moskvina argues, meaningless plots for which it is difficult to find a title. The problem with the title lies in the problem of meaning. If there is no meaning, there is no clever title. If a film lacks both, it may fail to match the viewer's expectations and turns out to be a flop.

Another important issue raised by Moskvina is the lack of quality in contemporary film-making. She commends the quality of Soviet films, making special mention of the great skill of such talented film directors as Eldar Ryazanov, Leonid Gaidai, and Alexander Sokurov. She emphasizes that today Russia boasts a great quantity of films, although, it cannot boast great quality. She deplores the events scheduled for the "Year of Cinema" in Russia and offers her own agenda. In her writings Moskvina often describes contemporary authors as too materialistic.

## **Conclusions**

The study concludes that media criticism constitutes the core of literary journalism as it gives important social and artistic meaning to the meta-genre of the column. Tatyana Moskvina, a media critic, is relentlessly critical of cultural institutions. She analyses the reasons for the considerable decrease in quality of modern art. Providing critical reviews of media products from such industries as television, theatre, cinema, and literature, Moskvina draws the dividing line between a work of culture and a cultural product.



In literary journalism, assessments of the esthetic aspects of media texts are as effective as are discussions of social issues facing the media community and criticism of the creative industries that produce media products. The opinion column is the fundamental meta-genre of media criticism. Unlike the meta-genre, the format – a mode of existence of genre modification – is flexible and depends on the author's intention.

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