THE FOUNDATIONS OF LITERARY CRITICISM BY ABDALMALIK MORTADH: A STUDY OF THE RENEWAL FEATURES

مقومات النّقد الأدبي عند عبد الملك مرتاض:
دراسة في ملامح التجديد

KHEDIR Mohammed Larbi *(1)
[1]University of Eloued, Email: mohammedlarbi-khedir@univ-eloued.dz
Pragmatics and Discourse Analysis Laboratory.
ZIADI Amira (2)
[2]University of Constantine 1, Email: amiraziadi73@gmail.com

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Abstract

This study aims to reveal the foundations of literary criticism by the Algerian scholar Abdalmalik Mortadh, who became a pioneer in this field in Algeria. He enriched both national and international critical libraries with numerous theoretical and practical works, which were distinguished by renewal features that deserve attention and investigation, as they bridged the gap between heritage and modernity. Using the descriptive-analytical method and the meta-criticism theory, defining literary criticism, and presenting key features of renewal in Mortadh's works, such as intellectual richness, the integration of theory and practice, and the synthesis of tradition and modernity, we concluded that Mortadh's contributions constitute a modern critical project, worthy of emulation. The innovative character is evident in his critical language and broad culture.

key words: literary criticism, critical project, renewal, Abdalmalik Mortadh.

ملخص:

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى كشف المقومات التي تأسس عليها النقد الأدبي عند الأستاذ الجزائري عبد الملك مرتاض، والتي تمكن من خلالها أن يكون رائداللنقد الأدبي في الجزائر، وأن يثري المكتبة النقدية وطنيا ودوليا بجهود ومؤلفات كثيرة جمعت بين التنظير والتطبيق، واتسمت بملامح تجديدية جديرة بالنظر والتقصي.

من خلال المنهج الوصفي التحليلي، وفي ضوء نظرية نقد النقد، وبعد تقديم تعريفات تمهيدية بعلم النقد الأدبي ثم عرض بعض ملامح ومقومات التجديد عند مرتاض: الثراء المعرفي؛ المزاوجة بين النظري والتطبيقي؛ الجمع بين التراث والحداثة، نخلص إلى أنّ جهود الناقد تعدُ مشروعا نقديا حداثيا مميّزا يحق التّنويه به، وأنّ السمة التجديدية عنده تبرز من خلال خصائص كثيرة، أهمها اللغة النقدية وسعة المثاقفة.

الكلمات المفتاحية:نقد أدبي، مشروع نقدي، تجديد، عبد الملك مرتاض.

1. Introduction

Undoubtedly, the critical renewal movement in Western literary criticism during the second half of the last century led to a vital activity at the theoretical and practical levels, as well as in terms of perspectives and methodologies. This movement also fostered direct and indirect interaction with the critical and intellectual output of Western civilisation. The modern and contemporary Algerian criticism was not isolated from this influence. Rather, it witnessed the emergence of a vital movement that represents modernity and adopts a balanced stance toward heritage, including Arabic texts and their characteristics. Consequently, Arab literary criticism evolved as a science from the civilised identity taking place in the human and technical sciences.

This renewal was undertaken by a group of critics, thinkers, and pioneers of literary criticism, who embraced its contemporary philosophy and emerging theoretical foundations. Among these figures is the renowned Algerian critic, the late Abdalmalik Mortadh (May he rest in peace). He has a pioneering role and exceptional distinction, evidenced by his critical studies, which constitute a model project and efforts that merit recognition and scholarly investigation.

However, grounding these efforts and understanding their genuine foundations can only be achieved by highlighting their key features, particularly the way Mortadh's critical thought uniquely combines theoretical foundations with the practical side of modern methodologies. In addition to being objective in examining heritageand keeping up with modernity, he is interested in critical terminology through translation,

Arabization, and even neologism. Generally, this distinction comes from the breadth of Mortadh's intellectual and cultural knowledge and the depth of his critical training, shaped first by his authentic upbringing in Algerian Qur'anic schools, and later by his exposure to Western criticism in French institutions, where he earned his doctoral degree.

Based on Abdalmalik Mortadh's critical efforts and the characteristics of his critical project, the present study addresses the following questions: What are the intellectual and methodological foundations of Mortadh's critical thinking? And what are the renewal features in his theoretical and practical criticism? It tests the hypothesis that the diversity of Mortadh's intellectual and cultural background, his proficiency in foreign languages, and exposure to European universities, served as a definite source of the innovative featuresthat characterise his critical project.

To answer the research questions and explain Mortadh's critical efforts and their foundations of renewal, we use the descriptive-analytical method and a comprehensive overview of the features of Mortadh's work in light of the "criticism of criticism" theory. This approach is particularly relevant given Mortadh's numerous writings, which span theoretical and applied criticism**,** poetry and prose, and heritage and modernity. Therefore, understanding the innovative aspects of his thought can be achieved through a holistic view of his works and an analysis of selected opinions and statements that reflect his orientations on critical issues, especially contemporary ones.

2. Specificity of Literary Criticism by Mortadh

2.1. The Linguistic Definition of Criticism

Exploring the concept of criticism shows a variety of definitions and interpretations, due to its complexity andmultifaceted nature, as well as its connections to different disciplines of knowledge. Linguistically, the word criticism originates from the act of examining coins to distinguish the counterfeit. Over time, it evolved to be used in discussion and debate; for instance, I criticised someone means I discussed a certain matter with him (Ibn Mandhour , 1978, p. 426).Thus, the term criticism encompasses various connotations that imply distinguishing between what is good and what is bad, as well as differing opinions regarding such judgements.

According to Al-Muʿjam Al-Wasīṭ, the term criticism means to examine or test something to distinguish its good qualities from its bad ones.It is said,"He criticised prose or poetry" meaning that he revealed their advantages and disadvantages. Likewise, "someone criticises people" means that he finds their faults and gossips about them (Ibrahim et al, 1989 , p. 520). Hence, no single definition can encompass the full meaning of

criticism. Generally, it can be defined as the act of revealing the flaws of a thing or a person.

2.2. The Terminological Definition of Literary Criticism

Many linguists and literary critics have attempted to define the concept of criticismprecisely. Some have affirmed that it is the study, interpretation, analysis, and comparison of things with their counterparts or opposites, then making a judgment that determines theirvalue and rank (Al-Chaib, 1973, p. 115). In this context, criticism is a specialised scientific study that involves interpreting and explaining other works and revealing their strengths and weaknesses.

However, it is not easy to provide a single definition of criticism, due to its connectionsto multiple human sciences. Literary criticism is not the same as theatrical or artistic criticism, such as painting and sculpture. Accordingly, specialists defined literary criticism as the art of evaluating artistic and literary works and analysing them based on scientific principles (Wahba, Al-Mouhandis, 1984, p. 417).

Based on this definition, the scientific aspect is essential to the definition of criticism and its critical practice. Therefore, criticism is not merely whims or conjectures; rather, it involves theorising, establishing critical frameworks, and evaluating methods for analysing texts and discourses. It follows scientific and logical approaches to draw objective and precise conclusions. Consequently, a critic must be well-qualified in proper theories and orientations so that their judgments regarding texts are reasoned and free from personal bias or doctrinal partiality.

As texts and the human sciences differ, literary criticism may also be grounded in a particular perspective. Thus, some scholars defined it as a scientific study based on the principles of a specific critical school, or a combination of schools, applied according to what serves the literary text, to reveal its aesthetic qualities and areas of distinction.

Despite the different definitions of literary criticism, there is a common element that unites them. It is described as a set of methods used to examine literary works and their authors to uncover what is obscure, interpreting the literary text, and issuing judgments about it according to specific critical principles or methodologies (Wahba, Al-Mouhandis, 1984, p. 417).

2.3. Definition of Criticism by Mortadh

As theorists' role is to define criticism, it is better to be understood from Mortadh's critical efforts and orientations. He said that it has an unfixed nature that involves the distinction and interpretation of creative

works. As long as there has been creativity, there have been opinions about it. (Mortadh, 2010, p. 50)

In this definition, Mortadh means that the more criticism aligns with the production and development of the arts, the more varied their methods and forms. On the other hand, this makes it difficult to determine the role of criticism and the critic in literature. Mortadh raised a fundamental question, which is the hypothesis of his book On the Theory of Criticism: "Does criticism have an essence?" (Mortadh, 2010, p. 75). In other words, can we define the essence of criticism in general, and literary criticism in particular?

Mortadh attempted to answer this question by distinguishing between two levels of reading:

- **Extensive Reading:** It refers to reading literature either for scientific and educational benefit or pleasure. It is practised by the ordinary reader, whose reproductionof the text is often spontaneous and oral (Mortadh, Reading from Nothing, 2003, p. 13).
- **Professional Reading:** It is a complex and structured form of reading that relies on a combination of experimental, exploratory, and inferential procedures. It is a productive reading, which results in a written literary text. In some respects, this type of reading is referred to as criticism (Mortadh, Reading from Nothing, 2003, p. 13).

Mortadh emphasised that criticism is a scientific form of reading, arising from a well-grounded knowledge base of procedural tools associated with a particular critical school or a specific critical approach and style.Therefore, "Criticism is writing founded on knowledge" (Mortadh, On the Theory of Criticism, 2010, p. 30). He asserted that criticism cannot exist without familiarity with the tools of these critical methodologies. He explained: "criticism is a form of secondary artistic creation, and if it does not reach this level, it is considered mere rhetoric or pure curiosity. As a result, every text study must be based on scientific and objective methodological principles. It must also elevate to the level of secondary creation; otherwise, it cannot be called a study" (Mortadh, On the Theory of Criticism, 2010, p. 31).

This distinction between the levels of criticism leads to the conclusion that true literary criticism exceeds extensive reading to a higher level of careful, precise, and professional engagement with the text. It is because many texts and discourses do not have a single characteristic nor are composed solely of aesthetic literary patterns; rather, they are connected to other fields such as the creator's psychological and social aspects, historical

context,identity-related issues, or texts with particular sensitivities. As texts are specialised, it is logical that criticism should be specialised as well.

3. The Foundations of Critical Renewal by Mortadh

3.1. Mortadh's Knowledge of Western Methodologies

Abdalmalik Mortadh is one of the Algerian figures who contributed to shaping Algeria's critical identity, overcoming the obstacles that the Algerian literary and critical scene experienced. When Algerian literature was not recognised during the colonisation, post-independence, and the national crisis, Mortadh drew a new path for Algerian criticism and constructed its earliest features.

Mortadh drew upon the foundations of Western criticism, particularly the French one, without renouncing his benefit from the ancient Arab heritage. He adopted whatever served critical and literary study. He was neither biased nor closed off to any culture; rather, he attempted to create connections among various intellectual sources, forming a cognitive bridge that linked the old with the new, and the modern Western with the authentic Arab.

Abdalmalik Mortadh has a valuable project in all critical methodologies. He kept pace with critical modernity and was well-versed in most approaches, leaving his distinctive critical imprint. This helps us explore the features of his works and intellectual contributions. He did not confine himself to Arab thought at the expense of Western traditions; likewise, he paid attention to theoretical aspects without neglecting practical ones. Therefore, he tried to bridge the gaps that critical theories had encountered.

Abdalmalik Mortadh is distinguished by a great intellectual background and a deeply classical formation immersed in the primary sources of the Arabic language. He stated: "Praise be to God. I memorised the Qur'an and recited it eleven times. I have devoted myself to the good works of Al-Maqamat, epistles, sermons, grammatical commentaries, and then poetry" (Boukhatem, 2002, p. 248).

Mortadh mastered the Arabic language at an early age. He learned its foundational sciences from his father, who was the village jurist, which made it easier for him to understand the language and delve into its complexities and eloquence. He believes that loving the Arabic language, appreciating its beauty, and recognising its magnificence is his duty. He considers it his mission to highlight the distinctiveness of Arabic and to encourage the new generation to cherish it, even if they learn foreign languages and understand their literary cultures.

Mortadh believes that the true Muslim's character is not complete unless they understand the issue of language alongside religious and cultural matters. He accepts engagement with Western culture. Indeed, he stated that renouncing Western civilisation is a form of obstinacy and leads to confusion. As Westerners did not hesitate to benefit from Islamic civilisation without developing a civilised complex in their behaviour, we also should not impose such a complex on our youth (Mortadh , The System of Coranic Discourse, 2002, p. 24).

Mortadh emphasises that learning Western sciences and cultures is not about adopting their principles, but rather understanding how to deal with them, and taking what serves knowledge in general and language in particular. This does not mean that we renounce our culture or heritage; rather, we strive to reach the points of beauty in language. He applied this when he studied French literary criticism, where he was among the first Arabs to deal with these critical sources.

Mortadh said: "My engagement with Western components began with methodology and awareness twenty years ago since I met my teacher (André Michaël), the renowned French Orientalist, from whom I learned many principles and the foundations of methodological critical grounding" (Boukhatem, 2002, p. 14). Thus, Mortadh's relationship with Western methodologies traces back to his doctoral supervisor, André Michaël. He advised him to read modern critical books by Roland Barthes, Tzvetan Todorov, Greimas, Gérard Genette, and Claude Lévi-Strauss.

Mortadh followed the advice, which explains his mastery of various Western methodologies. He studied them from their sources, attended lectures at French universities and followed their principles, as well as keeping up with contemporary literature and the works of French linguists in particular. He embarked on a new phase by reading about French modernity and its figures without reservation (Boukhatem, 2002, p. 14).

This intellectual diversity shaped Mortadh's critical identity, which is evident throughout his writings. We hardly ever find one of his works lacking original Arabic words that are accompanied by their Western equivalents, as if he took the responsibility for reconciling the two spheres. Yet, he was neither fanatical about his Arabic culture nor biased toward the old; rather, he advocated engaging with modern Western studies.

3.2. Reconciling Heritage and Modernity by Mortadh

The issue of heritage and modernity has occupied much attention in the Arab literary and critical scene. It has witnessed a noticeable division and formed groups, each advocating what it deemed right. A gap was evident between those who rejected modernity and its ideas and studies.

They opposed renewal and modernisation entirely and argued that Arab literature must rely solely on its creative and critical heritage. On the other hand, some refused to cling to their heritage and accepted everything Western that carries innovation. They argued that this would enable Arab literature and criticism to keep pace with the demands of the modern era and align with the global literary and critical scene.

For a better understanding of the issue, it is necessary to define each term. Heritage refers to inheritance, the transfer of a person's possessions after death to those entitled according to Islamic law. It is a religious term that the Arabs did not commonly use in the past. It did not exist in the classical lexicon, and it emerged with modernity as its opposite. Since modernity involves updating and renewing all that is old, heritage encompasses "that vast amount of experiences and values, and tangible and intangible customs and traditions left by ancestors and transmitted across generations for preservation" (Guerroum, 2023, p. 92)**.**

As for modernity, it signifies the new in thought and style, as well as the renunciation of all that is old. According to the philosophical dictionary, it denotes modernisation and renewal. It is any process that updates or renews what is old; therefore, it is used in various fields. However, this term emerges in the cultural, intellectual, and historical domains to indicate the stage of development that marked Europe in the modern era. (Hassiba, 2009, p. 179). This is what distinguished thought in the Arab world from keeping pace with global culture and development.

In literature, modernity means "a secular literary and intellectual doctrine based on purely Western ideas and beliefs, such as Marxism, Existentialism, Freudianism, and Darwinism, and influenced by preceding philosophical and literary schools, such as Surrealism, Symbolism, and others" (Hassiba, 2009, p. 179).

Some extreme philosophical currents that introduced modernity in European societies likely led many Arabs to reject modernity in the Arab and Islamic world. In this context, Mortadh asks: What is our stance on modernity? And what is our stance on heritage? Should heritage be entirely rejected? No rational person would say so. Then, how can we benefit from heritage while also benefiting from modernity at the same time? (Mortadh, One Thousand and One Nights A Semiotic-Deconstructive Analysis of Hammal Baghdad, 1993, p. 10).

Mortadh believes that modernity and heritage alone have no benefit. Therefore, neither of them is useful alone. Neither separation to the point of alienation and loss of identity, nor attachment to the point of rigidity and dissolution, is acceptable. This led Mortadh to classify critics into two

categories: a modernist group that blindly imitated the West, and a traditionalist group that imitated their ancestors as well (Mortadh, One Thousand and One Nights A Semiotic-Deconstructive Analysis of Hammal Baghdad, 1993, p. 11).

This statement is sufficient to determine Mortadh's position on modernity and heritage. He affirms that bias toward one side is an error in itself; rather, a skilled critic must choose a middle path between the two, taking from both what serves the language and its sciences, while respecting the particularities of each. Mortadh provided criticism with what enriches it, combining contemporary Western critical achievements with the Arabs' language heritage.

3.3. Creativity and Methodological Experimentation by Mortadh

Abdalmalik Mortadh's critical studies are marked by renewal and methodological diversity so that we hardly ever find an approach that he has not explored. In his early work, he focused on contextual approaches, which were popular at that time. He used the historical method in his study of the Arabic maqamat genre and in his book 'The Arts of Literary Prose in Algeria', which was the subject of his doctoral dissertation at the University of the Sorbonne in France. However, he also delves into new critical methods, as he rejected adherence to a single approach.

Mortadh was one of the most critical thinkers who dealt with various approaches, such as impressionism, historicism, structuralism, stylistics, semiotics, deconstruction, and modernist ideas that combined several methods through synthesis or the search for an integrated approach. (Oueglissi, 2008, p. 8)

Abdalmalik Mortadh's choices were neither arbitrary nor looking for plurality or distinction; rather, he is critically aware of renewal. He always strives to serve the language and unravel the rhetorical codes and the aesthetic features of the text. It is evident that "he adapts each critical era to its appropriate methodology; he is continuously evolving and renewing, and he does not remain within a single methodology before moving to another. It is not surprising—in his critical view—that he adopts an approach and then soon abandons it, as it no longer responds to the evolution of literary genres…" (Oueglissi, 2008, p. 31).

According to Mortadh, the continuous development in the literary scene requires a corresponding progress in criticism. The critical field has witnessed a global methodological revolution marked by different ideologies and academic orientations, which created a conflict in which every group advocates for the method it follows and refuses any approach that differs from its own. However, Mortadh studied a single method until

he uncovered its limitations. Then, he adopted another approach, believing it to be the desired one, and soon acknowledged its shortcomings as well. He stated: "We have become accustomed to the inadequacy of traditional methods in addressing the text content; they treat language as form, correct or incorrect, then they provide chaotic judgments on the text's author" (Mortadh, Between Intertextuality and Interwriting Essence and Development, 1996, p. 42.43).

Abdalmalik Mortadh concluded that both contextual and formal methods limit the value of the literary work, which contradicts the mission of criticism and the critic who develops the text's aesthetic qualities and elevates it toward an ideal form. Mortadh calls for 'the pursuit of new experiences that advance in this direction after the saturation that criticism has reached, especially in this century. This attitude should not close the door upon criticism; rather, it is a return to benefiting from all tools, procedures, and techniques to develop the course of criticism" (Mortadh, Narrative Discourse Analysis, 1995, pp. 6-7).

To develop criticism, Mortadh calls for combining the critical procedures of different approaches according to what best serves the text. Every text requires appropriate analytical tools for its study, but no problem in using multiple levels for various methods. Mortadh terms this with the 'non-method.' He insists on implementing it at both the theoretical and applied levels, without bias toward a single approach. For him, methodological synthesis serves the text better than relying on one method, as it inevitably provides precise answers and comprehensive truths generated by the text itself.

3.4. Mortadh'sConcern with Critical Language and Terminology

The methodological development of global criticism and modernity has generated a vast body of knowledge that has led to the renewal of critical terminology for each method or school. This led to a race to coin terms as a result of the shifts among approaches. "Each field of knowledge began to create its exclusive terminology, reserved for itself" (Mortadh, On the Theory of Criticism, 2010, p. 21). To unlock the depths of science and explore its complexities, a researcher must first understand its terminology, which is considered the primary key to knowledge.

In the Arab world, terminological productivity created a terminological strangeness, a noticeable epistemological overlap, and a dilemma when those terms were transferred into Arabic criticism. The translator faces a significant responsibility: Should he adopt the terms as they are in their mother language, or should he refine them in a way that suits the target language? Therefore, Mortadh gave great attention to the

critical term, and he adopted mechanisms that endowed his critical endeavour with distinctive terminology, relying on derivation, Arabization, coinage, generation, and translation (Oueglissi, 2008, p. 90). He succeeded in this due to his mastery of the French language, his training under prominent critics, and his extensive knowledge of Arabic dictionaries and their semantic nuances.

Due to the Arabic language's flexibility and Mortadh's scholarly diligence, he was able to find many Arabic stylistic equivalents for obscure Western critical terms or those that do not align with the Arabic contexts and particularities. He called for drawing upon the Arab terminological critical field and investing in the Arabic language's potential (Mortadh, On the Theory of Criticism, 2010, p. 6).

4. Conclusion

Ultimately, it can be affirmed that Abdalmalik Mortadh is one of the Algerian pioneers and a prominent contemporary Arab critic. His critical work is distinguished by the integration of Arab heritage with Western modernity, enabling him to forge a distinct path in literary criticism while preserving the particularity of the Arabic language and its texts. In response to the first research question, the findings revealed that the intellectual and methodological foundations of Mortadh's critical thinking are grounded in his mastery of Western critical methods and his profound knowledge of Arab critical heritage. Rather than rejecting Western approaches, he simplified and adapted them to Arab heritage contexts, seeking to adopt what served the Arabic language more effectively. He also conducted research in classical Arabic rhetoric to determine what could be employed in his critical practice.

In answer to the second research question, the study demonstrated that the renewal features of Mortadh's theoretical and practical criticism stem from his ability to combine authenticity with modernity. He created a terminological system grounded in his deep understanding of Arabic and the specific nature of Arabic text, in addition to his mastery of foreign languages, extensive knowledge, and critical and translational insight. Moreover, Mortadh implicitly called for moving beyond the dichotomy between formalist and contextual criticism by applying both the level-based and integrative methods while drawing on several theoretical and practical approaches. These critical efforts enabled him to establish a prominent position in the Arab critical movement, making his writings among the most important contemporary sources in the field.

These findings highlighted the relevance of Mortadh's critical thought for contemporary Arabic literary criticism. They also demonstrated

the significance of his contribution to the development of an authentic yet open critical methodology. Future research may further examine the application of Mortadh's methodological framework to contemporary Arabic literary texts, compare his critical vision with those of other Arab and international critics, or investigate the influence of his critical thought on subsequent generations of Arab literary scholars.

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