BRITISH LITERATURE IN HISTORY, OR BACK TO TYNYANOV

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În contextul actual al studiilor literare, în ciuda diversităţii curentelor şi metodelor de investigaţie literară în cadrul istoriei, criticii şi teoriei literare, îşi găseşte locul şi o reevaluare a tradiţiei critice cu scopul afirmării validităţii unor principii mai vechi, dar care pot fi utilizate şi în prezent. Studiul de faţă vizează, astfel, unele aspecte ale teoriei lui Tynyanov asupra literaturii ca sistem aplicată unei încercări de încadrare istorică a literaturii engleze.

In terms of a media-culture perspective, the decline of literacy and the indefinite future of the imaginative writing are nowadays matters of general lament, as it is the fact that literature might have lost its primary role to satisfy the aesthetic and intellectual needs of the modern man. Facing a complexity of new cultural alternatives, our contemporaries display exaggerated confidence in television, cinema, computers, and Internet; they often watch television or surf the net web-pages instead of reading books, use tapes for learning languages or compact discs for getting acquainted with Dickens' novels. The books, then, would survive a limited time in the human cultural store, and many of them are in danger of being forgotten in a remote corner of an old library.

The concept of literacy is an essential principle for the survival of the books, yet, besides literature, literacy refers to many other types of mass communications and theories of mass culture, and literature is not the only reliable vehicle for cultural communication, improvement of modern thought or acquisition of information. In some of these respects, one may argue, television and computer are much more reliable, practical, and resourceful tools than the whole of imaginative writing. On the other hand, the invention of television and the computer has not decreased the printing of books; moreover, the computer screen, Internet, and communication through e-mail display more alphabetic letters than images.

The problem is not to oppose visual and written types of cultural communication. It is that, though the whole of image-oriented culture and media attempts at reifying a new form of literacy, the problem consists in a general illiteracy caused by the open exposure to a form of visual illiteracy of the media and the insufficient exposure to important and mind-appealing books. In vindicating the role of imaginative literature, "do not fight against false enemies", says Umberto Eco in *Apocalypse Postponed* (1995), because, first of all, "we know that books are not ways of making somebody else think in our place; on the contrary they are machines which provoke further thoughts. Secondly, if once upon a time people needed to train their memory in order to remember things, after the invention of writing they had also to train their memory in order to remember books. Books challenge and improve memory. They do not narcotize it. This old debate is worth reflecting on every time one meets a new communicational tool which pretends or appears to replace books [3, p. 89-90].

What has shown itself as a modality capable enough to reassure and strengthen the role of literature as an agent able to satisfy the intellectual needs of humans is the permanent re-evaluation of the past national and international literary heritage, as well as the evaluation of the contemporary literary practice, in the context of what Matthew Arnold more than one hundred years ago described in *The Study of Poetry* as a disinterested effort to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world. This endeavour, the Victorian scholar believes, is the 'real estimate', the real approach to literature leading to its true understanding and to "a sense for the best, the really excellent, and of the strength and joy". These ideas seem nowadays superfluous and obsolete, being long ago rejected and replaced by the more scientific and methodological critical perspectives of formalism, structuralism, psychoanalysis, deconstruction, and other approaches developed by the twentieth-century literary theory and criticism.

In the most general terms, the previous and subsequent to Matthew Arnold periods have developed in the field of literary studies three major perspectives of approach to literature, three directions offering theoretical and practical possibilities to study and understand literature, and which are commonly referred to as critical, theoretical and historical. The three approaches to literature – literary theory (the theory of literature), literary criticism, and literary history (the history of literature) – despite the huge debates over their functions and even necessity, represent three distinct scientific disciplines having their own definitions, characteristics, termino-

logy, objects of study, and methodologies; they are interconnected, having obvious points of identification and separation.

The standard dictionary definition regards history of literature as the diachronic approach to literature (including literary periods, movements, trends, doctrines, and writing practice). Literary criticism is the study/analysis/investigation/approach to particular literary texts on both thematic and structural levels. Literary theory develops and offers general methodologies and principles of research of the literary phenomena. If the first approach embarks on a diachronic perspective in literary studies and investigates the development of a national and world literature, the second is considered synchronic, and the third one is referred to as universal. In matters of subjectivism and objectivism, the history of literature and especially literary theory are designated as sciences, requiring normative and methodological objectivism, whereas literary criticism allows subjectivism to intermingle with objective reasoning, art with science, fusing in one discourse the personal responses to literature and the scientific research, but what the critical discourse requires most is the accurate balance between the subjective and objective component.

Literary theory, literary criticism, and literary history are interrelated and interdependent, and co-exist in the field of literary studies as bound by their major and common object of study which is the literary work. Their interrelationship and interdependence form a permanent circular movement from the historically placed literary practice to literary criticism, from literary criticism to literary theory and from literary theory back to criticism. The text – either produced recently or representing an earlier period in literary history – is subject to literary criticism whose concluding reflections (the necessary outcome of literary criticism), if generally accepted and proved valid in connection to other thematically and structurally similar literary texts, emerge into the domain of literary theory, become its general principles of approach to literature, and are applicable to the study of literature in general. Literary criticism uses them in practical matters of research whenever the study of particular literary works is required, adding to the objective theory the critic's individual response to the text, and the expected result is, on one hand, the development of new or alternative theoretical perspectives, and, on the other hand, the change, promotion, discouragement, revival or in some other ways the influence upon the literary practice of its own historical period, and the influence upon the literary attitude of the reading audience concerning the contemporary and past literary tradition. Literary criticism is thus not to be regarded as just the analysis or evaluation of particular literary works but also as the formulation of general principles of approach to such works. Co-existing in the field of literary studies with literary history and literary theory, literary criticism combines the theoretical/scientific and practical levels of literary analysis. Criticism as science follows and applies the general principles and methods of research from literary theory, but it also reveals an artistic aspect when the critic personalizes the discourse by his/her own opinions. The true literary critic uses literary theory to evaluate the literary text, and out of the synthesis of the borrowed theory with his/her personal opinions the critic develops other theoretical perspectives while keeping the proper balance between the objective and subjective component, between the use of theory and personal contribution.

This relationship of the three approaches to literature suggests that literary history is more of a distinct discipline, standing apart, whereas literary theory and literary criticism are stronger connected, hence their consideration as one discipline under the generic name of 'literary theory and criticism'. However, this relationship of the three approaches to literature also points to the fact that literary theory, literary criticism, and the history of literature are parts of a single cognitive system, a single discourse whose aim is to form or facilitate a particular type of communication which involves the producer of literature and its receiver.

Literature, a cultural phenomenon, one of the arts, the verbal art, is in the simplest way defined as imaginative writing and is likewise better understood as a system of elements framed within the boundaries of a communicative situation. The six elements in communication, as identified by Roman Jakobson in *Linguistics and Poetics* (1963),

	Context	
Addresser	Message	Addressee
	Contact	
	Code	

each having a corresponding function of language (referential, emotive, poetic, conative, phatic, and metalingual), receive in literary communication their equivalent parts ('addresser' or 'sender' is the 'author' or 'writer', 'message' is the 'text', 'addressee' or 'receiver' is the 'reader', and so on) which constitute the elements of

the literary system. Guy Cook in *Discourse and Literature* [1, p.128] identifies and places these elements in a simple but comprehensive structure of the literary communicative situation:

<center>

Society

Author	Text	(Performer)	Reader
	Texts	Language	

</center>

Every literary work represents a text, the product of an author, known to us or anonymous; the literary work addresses a reader; its material is language; it is produced in relation to a certain social background; and it always exists in relation to other texts that represent previous literary traditions or the contemporary to the given literary work period. The literary work in itself and the different relations between the text and the other elements of the literary system gave birth to different theories, trends and schools in modern literary theory and criticism. As a result, the contemporary literary critic faces a multitude of schools and theories that correspond to the categories from the structure of the literary system. Instead of heavily borrowing ideas and providing quotations from the existing critical and theoretical studies, the critic may relate and apply them to his/her particular matters of concern. A more skilled critic considers the essence of different theories, modifying it according to the specificity of the research, and, by providing personal points of view and ideas, the critic progresses to certain interpretative modalities of his/her own.

Concerning the most important critical theories, trends and schools, and according to Guy Cook's literary communicative situation, in the field of literary theory and criticism the 'author' is the matter of concern of literary scholarship and biography; 'text' is studied by formalism, linguistics, linguistic criticism, and stylistics; 'performer' by acting theory; 'reader' by phenomenology, hermeneutics, reception theory, reader-oriented and reader-response theory, as well as by psychoanalysis, feminism, and post-structuralism; 'society' by Marxist theories, cultural materialism, new historicism, and feminism; 'texts' by structuralism, post-structuralism, and deconstruction; and corresponding to 'language' are the theories of linguistics and stylistics. Literature on the whole and the particular elements of the literary system are also the matters of critical concern of rhetoric, semiotics, Bakhtinian criticism, archetypal and myth criticism, ethnic literary studies, colonial, postcolonial and transnational studies, cultural studies, and other contemporary trends and schools in humanities and in literary theory and criticism. These theories, trends and schools represent the twentieth-century and the contemporary scientific, objective and methodological literary theory and criticism. The development of world literary theory and criticism has its origins in ancient period, whereas concerning the rise and development of the theoretical and critical discourse on literature in Britain, one should consider Renaissance and its subsequent periods.

Literature on the whole and the particular elements of the literary system represent the main concern of the history of literature as well, in particular in the light of Paul Ricoeur's (*From Text to Action: Essays in Hermeneutics II*, 1986) hermeneutic perspectives of the textual arrangement and text analysis with regard to the human experience considered diachronically: (1) the implication of language as discourse, (2) the implication of discourse as a structured literary work, (3) the relation between verbal and written form in the discourse and structured literary work, (4) structured literary work/discourse as the projection of another world, (5) structured literary work as the projection of the authorial life which is transfigured through the discourse, (6) structured literary work as the self-comprehension of reader [8, p.86]. The literary work is undoubtedly a phenomenon dated in time, and represents, as Romul Munteanu clearly states it in *Metamorphoses of the Modern European Criticism* (1988), the product of a historical time in which a human group develops a particular view on existence, a view that comes to be expressed by exceptional individuals, the producers of literary works, themselves exponents of a particular historical background. In this respect, the discipline of the history of literature performs a historical investigation of literature, and studies the national and world literary development in relation to its periods, movements, trends, writers and works.

Modern literary theory and criticism discusses the literary work as a synchronic phenomenon, removing the text from its temporal and spatial context. The separation of criticism from the diachronic dimension of the literary history and its subsequent consolidation as a distinct domain were caused, according to Rene Wellek and Austin Warren (*Theory of Literature*, 1942), by the distinction between the consideration of literature as a simultaneous order and the view on literature as a line of works arranged chronologically and regarded as constituent parts of the historical process. Neither the research of the text as a synchronic phenolmenon nor the historicism of the literary experience are to be neglected, but in order to achieve the adequate

comprehension of the literary works of different writers and periods, it is necessary to overcome the gap between literary criticism and literary history by fusing the synchronic and the diachronic dimension in literary analysis, and by strengthening the relationship between text and context. It is the task of literary criticism to involve the diachronic perspective in the study of the text. Otherwise, without understanding literature in its growth, the relationship between tradition and innovation, the origins of literary work, the author's psychology and artistic sensibility, and the social and cultural circumstances that make possible the production of the work and are reflected in the work, the critic would scarcely offer competent judgement on the value of the text. Likewise, it is the task of literary history to remain a scientific discipline by involving in the study on the rise and development of literature the synchronic dimension of the literary criticism and the scientific principles of research offered by the literary theory; that is, the history of literature, in order to claim the status of a science, must be a rigorous system equipped with scientific methodology.

Otherwise, the history of literature might be reduced to a mere gallery of biographies, or become, as Hans Robert Jauss warns in *Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory* (1970), an obsolete object of study, whose existence would be determined only by a didactic purpose and the necessity of being traditionally included as a part of cultural information.

Earlier than Jauss, at the beginning of the twentieth-century, Yuri Tynyanov (*On Literary Evolution*, 1927) had already pointed at the methodological discrepancy in the field of literary history, which is due to the divergence between an "individualistic psychologism" in the historical investigation of literature and a "schematically causal approach to the literary order". The former type replaces the problem of literature with the question of the author's psychology, and the investigation of literary history becomes the investigation of the genesis of literary phenomena. The latter leads to a sharp disagreement between the literary order and the point of observation that might be located in a social order: such an effort of literary history to investigate the advances of a literary order (that is, of literary variability), Tynyanov believes, is doomed to incompleteness because the study of a closed literary order and the examination of the development within it frequently come up against neighbouring cultural, behavioural, and social orders in the broad sense.

Literature is above all interrelated with social conventions, and as such the correlation takes place first of all through its verbal aspect. That is, the interrelation between literature and society is realized through language, and in relation to social background the prime function of literature is its verbal function. Using the term 'orientation' to denote the author's creative intention, Tynyanov suggests that the intention is changed by the structural function (the interrelationship of elements within a work) into a catalyst, the 'creative freedom' yields to 'creative necessity', and the literary function (the interrelationship of a work with the literary order) completes the process, the 'orientation' of a literary work proving to be its 'verbal function', its interrelationship with the social conventions. It is futile to study the verbal function of literature in relation to some distant conditions, such as economic, as it is useless to study directly the author's psychology, environment, daily life, and class as to establish the origins of the literary phenomena. Clearly, Tynyanov believes, the problem here is not one of individual psychological conditions, but of objective, evolving functions of the literary order in relation to the adjacent social order.

Likewise, in discussing practical criticism in the book *Critical Approaches to Literature* (1982), David Daiches states that the approach to literary work should be different from going to biography or psychology to discover the author's 'intention', for "it is less personal intention than artistic tradition that is the real question" [2, p.265].

Back to Tynyanov, the two main types of the historical investigation of literature – the investigation of the genesis of literary phenomena and the investigation of the growth of a literary order – are both problematic, as problematic is the theory of value that has brought about the danger of studying major but isolated works and has changed the history of literature into what Tynyanov calls "history of generals", i.e. of 'great works', in determent of the study of mass literature. The very term 'history of literature' is a problem as well, as it seems to be extremely broad and pretentious, suggesting the study of the history of *belles lettres*, the history of verbal art, and the history of writing in general.

In Tynyanov's opinion, which is nowadays still valid and viable, the solution for making literary history a literary science, conferring to it the necessary methodological rigour, is to re-examine the problem of 'influence', one of the most complex problems of literary history, in relation to the existence of specific literary conditions. More than that, it is necessary to reconsider the notion of 'tradition', the basic term in the studies on

literary history, in the light of the fact that a literary work is a system, as is literature itself, and the fundamental concept for literary change and development is the 'substitution of systems'.

The literary system is "a system of the functions of the literary order which are in continual interrelationship with other orders". The system of a literary work consists of certain elements that are interrelated and interacting. Some elements of a work in prose, such as rhythm, are also elements of the system of a work in poetry, and their study shows that the role of such elements is different in different systems.

The interrelationship of each element with every other in a literary work and with the whole literary system as well is called the *structural function* of the given element. This function reveals that a distinct element is, on one hand, interrelated with different elements within the same work, and, on the other hand, it is interrelated with similar elements in other works and even in other systems. The former is termed by Tynyanov the *syn-function*, and the latter *auto-function*, both operating simultaneously but being of different relevance. Tynyanov points at the mistake to isolate the elements from one system and to correlate them with other systems without taking into consideration their structural function, as he notifies on the impossibility to study a literary work as a system without comparing it with the general system of literature. Such an isolated study of a literary work may be successful in the literary criticism that focuses on contemporary works, since the interrelationship of a contemporary work with contemporary literature is involuntarily taken as an established fact.

However, argues Tynyanov, even in contemporary literature, isolated study is impossible because the very existence of a text as literary depends on its interrelationship with both literary and extra-literary orders, and its existence depends on its function. What in one period would be a matter of social communication, in another would be a literary fact, or vice versa, depending on the whole of the literary system in which the given text appears. Thus, no one can be certain of the structure of a work if it is studied in isolation, since the auto-function (the interrelationship of an element with similar elements in other systems) determines the syn-function (the constructional function of the element). According to Tynyanov, the *constructional function* is the correlation of each element of the literary work with other elements of the system, and thus with the whole system. It is a mistake to separate the elements from the system and to correlate them outside the system, that is to neglect their constructional function. The existence of a literary fact depends on its differential quality, that is its function. The rise and development of the literary form determines the change of function, yet the function in its turn searches for its form, hence their interdependence. The variability of the function of a formal element of the system, the appearance of a new function of a formal element or its association with another function, the differential interaction of the elements of a system, the existence of some 'dominant' elements that produce as such the 'deformation' of other elements mean actually, in Tynyanov's opinion, the *literary evolution as the substitution of systems*. In other words, to understand the development of literature as the 'substitution of systems' is to perceive it as "the change in interrelationships between the elements of a system, between functions and formal elements".

Coming back to the concept of 'tradition' in literature, it is to be remembered that the substitutions of literary systems vary from period to period; they may occur rapidly or slowly; they do not necessarily require the complete renewal or replacement of the formal elements of the system but rather a new function of these formal elements (hence the idea that the comparison of certain literary phenomena must be made on the basis of functions, not only forms). And thus what may be called 'traditionalism' is, as to give an example from Tynyanov, the fact that each literary movement in a given period seeks its supporting point in the preceding systems, as each new genre, form or type of literary text does.

Yuri Tynyanov's ideas on literary work and literature conceived as systems are applicable in different domains of humanities, such as linguistics (as language itself is a system), translation studies, and cultural studies, and in different literary disciplines, such as comparative literature, where, in particular, the issue of 'reception' – the study of the process of reception of a literature (as a system) in another literature or another cultural background (conceived as systems) – receives a strong theoretical and practical basis. Although highly important for the elucidation of the status and role of literary history as a scientific discipline, Tynyanov's theory of the literary system, due to its normative principles and methodological rigour, may not always be appropriate in the study of literature when facing some national peculiarities of literary history, or the individual creative imagination that is both ready to assume an established tradition, model or pattern of writing and to provide the unexpected innovation, literary experimentation, and modernization of the literary discourse.

The interrelationship between 'tradition' and 'innovation' in the historical advancement of literature acts upon a literary system that, by placing a group of its elements in the 'dominant' position, makes possible the

deformation of the other elements, and a new work emerges into literature and takes on its own literary function through this 'dominant'.

This is the factor that determines the change and development of the literary phenomena in the course of different succeeding periods. This is true concerning genres as well as periods and movements. Thus the literary system of the medieval romance changes in Renaissance into the system termed by the noun 'roman' ('novel') when elements of extended narration, setting, character representation and others become 'dominant', and others like verse form and the supernatural element are extinguished; on the contrary, when other elements, such as love intrigue, subjective and psychological experience, the fantastic and the irrational involved in action, are placed in the 'dominant' position, the literary system of the romance is substituted in the second half of the eighteenth-century by the system of a particular type of poetry called by the adjective 'romantic'. The element of 'the revival of ancient classical tradition' in the literary system of the Renaissance period becomes 'dominant' in relation to the social and cultural orders (systems) of the next seventeenth- and eighteenth-century, making possible the substitution of the system of Renaissance literature by that of Enlightenment.

This is also true concerning any particular literary tradition, or type of literary text. The 'dominance' of such elements as adventure, ordeal, trial, chronotope of road, moral issues of personal conduct, love experience, autobiography, change of condition with respect to social background, representing the system of the picaresque novel, to which the 'dominant' element of character formation is added in Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, makes possible the rise in the nineteenth-century of the fictional system of the Bildungsroman. This type of novel, now a literary tradition, seeks its supporting points in the previous systems, especially in those of the ancient and picaresque narratives, but places in its turn a group of its elements in the 'dominant' position, makes possible the deformation of other elements, and as the result works representing the related fictional types of Entwicklungsroman, Erziehungsroman and Künstlerroman emerge into world literature.

Each literary work is correlated with a particular literary system depending on its deviation, its 'difference' as compared with the literary system with which it is confronted. Moreover, since a literary system is a system of the functions of the literary order which is in continual interrelationship with other orders, such as social and cultural, systems change in their composition, but the differentiation of human activities remains. The growth of literature, as of other artistic systems, does not coincide either in rate or in character with the social and cultural systems with which it is interrelated, and this is owing to the specificity of the material with which it is concerned. The rise of the structural function occurs rapidly, that of the literary function occurs over epochs, and the one concerning the functions of a whole literary system in relation to neighbouring systems occurs over centuries.

The place of literature in history is reified by the rise, development and consolidation of succeeding each other literary periods, movements, trends, writers, and literary works. Each of these is rooted in the previous ones, represents a continuation of the previous ones, and at the same time rejects the previous ones, attempting at suppressing them and taking their place in literary history. Each period, movement, trend, writer, and text is followed by another; each has its own rise, development, consolidation and decline, but not complete disappearance, as each one influences the next, gives its origins or is rejected by the next one, or the elements of its system are acknowledged in the systems of the subsequent periods, movements, trends, and literary works under different forms and functions. Each period, movement, trend, writer, and text represents one to another tradition and innovation, placed one against the other, where a continuous 'battle' takes place between their elements. The status of literature in history is actually determined by the interrelationship, the 'fight' between 'tradition' and 'innovation', 'classical' and 'modern', 'conservative' and 'experimental', dependence on rules and the freedom of artistic expression. It is a correlation of two contrary factors whose interaction is the motor of change and development of literature, disclosing the substitution of systems. In the history of literature, the concept of 'tradition' is used to denote the ancient classical period, the eighteenth-century Age of Enlightenment, also referred to as Classicism or Neoclassicism, the nineteenth-century Realism, the twentieth-century socially-concerned literature; the term 'innovation' denotes some literary experiences of the Renaissance period, metaphysical poetry, Romanticism, the late nineteenth-century Symbolism, Aestheticism and other avant-garde trends, and the twentieth-century Modernism and post-modern literature, as well as other more recent experimental trends. In this respect, the literary history studies the rise and development of a national literature and the world literary phenomena from its beginnings to the present day, and divides the historical process into literary periods which may or may not correspond to the social or political ones. The

literary periods consist of literary movements and trends, which are represented by authors and their literary works and/or literary doctrine. The distinction made between the movement and the trend relies actually on the fact that a movement groups those writers who produce both literary works (that share similar thematic and structural features) and literary doctrine (texts of literary theory and criticism that share common ideas about their own type of literature) – Romanticism, for example; whereas a trend is formed of the producers of only literary texts having common characteristics – the nineteenth-century Realism, for example.

The literary periods are considered to refer to different sequences of time conceived in the temporal boundaries of an age, century, centuries, or years, but such an understating of the period may thwart any attempts at tracing clear demarcation lines between literary periods, movements and trends, or at clearly asserting them terminologically. Renaissance is certainly neither a movement nor a trend but a distinct period in the literary history. Metaphysical poetry, however, is first of all a trend that manifested itself only on the level of literary practice, but it is also a part of the larger period of English Renaissance. Romanticism represents a period ('Romantic Period', or the 'Age of Romanticism', dated between the years of 1798 and 1824, or in more general terms between the last decades of the eighteenth-century and the first decades of the nineteenth-century) and at the same time Romanticism is a literary movement ('Romantic Movement', consisting of both imaginative writing and the doctrine, literary texts (such as *Tintern Abbey* by Wordsworth, or *Kubla Khan* by Coleridge) and the critical ideas (from Wordsworth's *Preface to Lyrical Ballads*, for example, or Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*) about these texts). In British literature, Neoclassicism is a period in literary history covering the last part of the seventeenth-century throughout the eighteenth-century; Neoclassicism is a movement in literature with its poetic works and a strongly normative and prescriptive doctrine; and also Neoclassicism is the creator of a particular trend in poetry, philosophical and satirical. Likewise, Modernism is a period in the first half of the twentieth-century, a complex artistic manifestation consisting of a number of distinct movements (Futurism, for example) and developing a number of trends in the production of literary texts (for instance, the 'stream-of-consciousness novel' of James Joyce).

A diachronic perspective on literature in Britain reveals a historical process that follows the general European pattern, yet in some moments having its particular manifestations. A special problem here is the establishment of some exact periods in the development of both British and world literature. In most general terms, literature is regarded as passing through three major periods: ancient, medieval and modern, whereas since the middle of the twentieth-century humanity is in the post-modern period, a period claimed to represent the transition to globalization. The first period in European literature is the classical period of ancient Greece and Rome, rejected and replaced by Middle Ages.

Concerning British literature in Middle Ages, historians have noticed the discrepancy between English and general world/European conditions: first, English literature does not have an ancient period, like Greece, Rome, Egypt, China, or India, and, second, its actual medieval period starts much later than the European one, which is the eleventh-/twelfth-century, for the simple reason that there was no English nation at all until that period.

It was the fifth-century that saw the invasion of the British islands by the Anglo-Saxon tribes coming from the Continent, which lasted for more than a century, and then the formation, the 'becoming' of these people as English for more than four centuries, which marked a period called in the history of English nation, language and literature as 'Anglo-Saxon' or 'Old English'. Conquered in their turn by the Normans in the eleventh-century, the newly formed English nation enters now 'officially' into Middle Ages that lasted for centuries until around 1500. The medieval period is in its turn rejected and replaced by the age of Renaissance, which is considered either as the first part of the modern period that lasted until the middle of the twentieth-century, or as a period of transition from Middle Ages to modern period, now conceived as lasting from the seventeenth-century Enlightenment to the middle of the twentieth-century. The art and literature of Renaissance already reveal the two contradictory but co-existing aspects of 'innovation' (for instance, sonnet in poetry) and 'tradition' (the revival of ancient models, as, for example, in Renaissance tragedy), and a more detailed consideration agrees that henceforth the growth of literature displays a rather complex picture. The emergence of the innovative spirit in literature continues after Renaissance as the Baroque period (metaphysical poetry in English literature, also considered by some critics as the last manifestation of British Renaissance), but this cultural extravaganza is rejected and suppressed by the much stronger and dominant traditional element that, based on the revival of ancient classical artistic doctrine and practice, becomes itself a period and dominates as Enlightenment (or Neoclassicism in England) the entire social as well as cultural and literary background of Europe for more than one hundred years starting with the middle of the seventeenth-

century. By the middle of the eighteenth-century, the doctrine of Enlightenment/Neoclassicism is put into practice by the more pragmatic British mind, giving rise to Industrialisation and thus determining the decline and end of Neoclassicism as a distinct period. It is also the eighteenth-century that saw the rise of the novel in English literature, and by the middle of the period the rise of the pre-romantic poetry. As a rejection of Neoclassicism and the continuation of Pre-Romanticism, the Romanticism emerges at the end of the eighteenth-century reviving the innovative spirit in literature and breaking the linearity of literary development dominated for a long period after Renaissance by the traditional and normative principles of the revived ancient classical doctrine. Romanticism ends as a regular trend by the middle of the nineteenth-century, and henceforth in literature 'tradition' and 'innovation' co-exist again under different names and in the framework of different movements and trends.

In the simplest consideration of the facts, Romanticism gave in the second half of the nineteenth-century Symbolism, Aestheticism, Impressionism, Expressionism, and other manifestations of the artistic avant-gardism, which, in the first half of the twentieth-century, continue into a more complex range of experimental and innovative trends and movements (Surrealism, Dadaism, Cubism, 'stream-of-consciousness' novel, etc.) assembled and assigned together as Modernism, which in its turn continues in the second half of the twentieth-century as the innovation and experimentation of Post-Modernism – this is the component of 'innovation' in literary history, an evolutionary line having its origins in Renaissance, continued in Baroque, suppressed by classical tradition but revived by Romanticism, developed by late nineteenth-century avant-garde trends and diversified by the twentieth-century Modernism and Post-Modernism.

Some elements of the main 'enemy' of Romanticism, Neoclassicism, re-appear in the second half of the nineteenth-century in the system of the likewise conventional, normative and socially concerned Realism which emerges almost unchanged in its thematic and structural perspectives in the twentieth-century, opposing with its traditional realistic concern the innovatory and experimental art – this is the component of 'tradition' in literary history, an evolutionary line having its origins in ancient period, revived in Renaissance, changed, developed and institutionalised in the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Enlightenment/Neoclassicism, rejected and replaced by Romanticism but present again on the literary scene as the nineteenth-century Realism, and continued and diversified by the twentieth-century writers of social and realistic concern.

To summarise, every new literary period, movement, trend results in and rejects the previous ones on the basis of the opposition between normative tradition and experimental innovation. Tradition and innovation are parts of a single process of literary change and development, contrary but interrelated, emerging in different periods under different names and in the system of different movements, trends and literary works, rejecting and succeeding each other, but from the second half of the nineteenth-century to the present day co-existing as two distinct dimensions of literature. Concerning the major periods in the history of British literature, the standard opinion, originated in the nineteenth-century in relation to the development of English language, regards three periods: the period between 449/700 and 1100/1200 is called that of 'Old English (Anglo-Saxon) Literature', 'Middle Literature' between 1100/1200 and 1500, and the period from around 1500 till the second half of the twentieth-century is that of the 'Modern British Literature', followed by the 'Post-Modern Period'. A more suitable consideration divides British literature into (a) 'Old English (Anglo-Saxon) Literature', (b) 'The Middle Ages', (c) 'The Renaissance', (d) 'The Seventeenth-Century', (e) 'The Eighteenth-Century', (f) 'The Romantic Movement', (g) 'The Victorian Age', (h) 'The First Half of the Twentieth-Century', and (i) 'The Second Half of the Twentieth-Century'. A more recent consideration of the major periods in the history of British literature is provided by Andrew Sanders in *A Short Oxford History of English Literature* (2004), who divides English literary history into 'Old English Literature' (447-1066), 'Medieval Literature' (1066-1510), 'Renaissance and Reformation' (1510-1620), 'Revolution and Restoration' (1620-1690), 'Eighteenth-Century Literature' (1690-1780), 'The Literature of the Romantic Period' (1780-1830), 'High Victorian Literature' (1830-1880), 'Late Victorian and Edwardian Literature' (1880-1920), 'Modernism and Its Alternatives' (1920-1945), and 'Post-War and Post-Modern Literature' (1945-present).

Each of these periods – except, perhaps, the Old English period and Romanticism – has its own particular stages that correspond to specific sub-periods, or movements, or trends, or major authors. Thus the medieval period of British literature covers Anglo-Norman literature, Geoffrey Chaucer and his epoch, and the fifteenth-century; Renaissance is divided in the period of Humanism and Elizabethan Age; the seventeenth-century includes metaphysical trend in poetry, the Puritan period, and the Restoration period; the eighteenth-century consists of Neoclassicism (Augustan Age), the rise of the English novel, and Pre-Romanticism;

following the period of the Romantic Movement, the Victorian Age covers the literature of Realism, post- and neo-romantic writing, the Pre-Raphaelite Movement, and Aestheticism ('art for art's sake' doctrine); the twentieth-century includes, in the first half of the century, the Edwardian period, Modernism, and the new realistic writing, and, in the second half of the century, the Angry Generation and other manifestations of the traditional realistic writing, and the experimental post-modern literature.

Concerning the differences in the history of British and general European literary phenomena, it has been often brought into discussion the so-called 'complex of insularity' of the British cultural background, its strong regional and conservative features in relation to the rest of Europe. Throughout its history, British culture seems reluctant to accept the continental influences, new developments in literature and other arts, new movements, trends and styles, whose origins have been in France and Italy, and to a lesser extent in Spain and Germany. Hence the fact that English literature is a late phenomenon, from the very beginning and throughout its entire literary history. It may take a century or more to speak about English Renaissance or the consolidation of a literary tradition in English fiction, decades for Romanticism or Symbolism, as if British literary background must finally yield to the acceptance of what in contemporary Europe has been already established as a dominant literary tradition, movement or trend.

Still, many English authors on the side of the freedom of artistic expression remained for centuries unknown or wrongly evaluated, such as Donne and Hopkins, or, like Byron and Joyce, had to escape from the conservatism and reluctance of the fellow-citizens and produce their works in some other countries. It is claimed, however, that the English literary 'complex of insularity' ends with the synchronization in the first half of the twentieth-century of the British with European Modernism, due to the contribution of, among others, Joyce and Eliot, though in the second half of the last century English literature turns again to realistic and social concerns rather than literary experimentation, being traditional rather than innovative.

It might be that British literature has been in general traditional rather than innovative, but it passes nowa-days, as many national literatures do, through a process of decentralization due to globalization, the country membership in European Union, new developments in sociology, anthropology, women's studies, cultural studies, and postcolonial and transnational studies. Perhaps the most significant factor of decentralization of British literature is the advancement of English as a world language, spoken worldwide by millions who have no other connection with Britain. British literature might have been traditional rather than innovative, but it is an aberration to assume that it represents weak literary phenomena, lacking aesthetic strength and significance, and that it is investigated and taught merely because of some political, economic, colonial, postcolonial or linguistic causes. British literature is rich and complex, studied in almost every country of the world and acclaimed by Anglo-American as well as international scholarship, as to remember just Emile Legonis and Louis Cazamian who, in their celebrated *A Short History of English Literature* (1929), saw English literature possessing "a greater capacity than other literature for combining a love of concrete state-ment with a tendency to dream, a sense of reality with lyrical rapture", and English writers characterized by "loving observation of Nature, by a talent for depicting strongly-marked character, and by a humour that is the amused and sympathetic noting of the contradictions of human nature and the odd aspects of life".

British literature is an important part of the world literary heritage, answering and assuming during its history most of the innovation and development in arts and literature, and having its own contribution to world literary practice and literary doctrine, attributable to Chaucer in Middle Ages, Shakespeare, Marlowe, Spenser and Sidney in Renaissance, Donne, Marvell, Milton and Dryden in the seventeenth-century, Pope, Swift, Defoe, Richardson, Fielding and Sterne in the eighteenth-century, Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Shelley and Keats in Romanticism, Dickens, George Eliot, Emily Bronte, Charlotte Bronte, Tennyson, Robert Bro-wning, Swinburne, Arnold, Ruskin, Pater, Wilde and Carlyle in Victorian Age, and, in the twentieth-century, Joyce, Woolf, Lawrence, T. S. Eliot, Shaw, Hughes, Beckett, Pinter, Golding, Murdoch, Fowles, Barnes, Mitchell, Spark, Lodge, Larkin, and many other writers of all these periods, whose works are landmarks in the history of British as well as European and world literature and thought. The argument to be considered in the field of literary studies dealing with the history of English literature is that the literary texts produced by different writers in different periods of British history and civilization are not merely a category that needs to be included in an overall literary system of English or international cultural heritage for the sake of rendering its completeness and aesthetic validity. It is rather that they are different in kind, unique and representative of a type of literary discourse that should be studied as a system in itself, and which, if properly comprehended,

may perform the function of breaking down the existing views and theories about English literature in general or a particular literary manifestation in Britain, reorganizing them and suggesting new ones.

Following the principles announced by Tynyanov, the investigation of literary history is possible only in relation to *literature as a system, interrelated with other systems and conditioned by them*. Moreover, the study must move from constructional function (the interrelationship of each element with other elements of the system, and thus with the whole system of the literary work) to literary function (the interrelationship of a literary work with the literary order), and from literary function to verbal function (the interrelationship of a literary work with the social conventions), while clarifying the issue of the evolutionary interaction of functions and forms. In other words, the investigation of literature in its development must go from the literary system to the nearest correlated systems, such as social conventions, cultural doctrine, historical background, the author's psychology, daily life and personal experience, and the tastes and interests of the reading audience.

The study of literature may avoid any references to some distant systems, such as ethics and economy, but it must not ignore the importance of the private and social factors, as it is within this context that the literary significance of the work can be better clarified. The emphasis on historical dimension and the consideration of the social and biographical influences on the work must not exclude the synchronic dimension, the methodological principles and the scientific rigour of literary theory and criticism, which literary history has access to. However, in the historical studies on British literature, or any national literature, or the history of world literature on the whole, it is clear that literary history, offering a historical vision on literature, is confronted by repeated methodological crises as this discipline is unable to fully synchronise itself with the innovations that constantly take place in modern literary theory and criticism. As Tynyanov has already warned on this matter, the historical investigation of literature might still have no clear theoretical awareness of how to study a literary work or what the nature of its significance is.

Even so, there is no reason for the death verdict announced by so many concerning the future of literary history, as it would never be proved the fact that any literary work is not historically determined, or that no literary text is an expression of an epoch, or that its production has no connection to the individual experience of the author. It is an aberration to think that a literary work can be properly understood by some criteria lacking temporal significance, and it is rather normal to assume the effort of joining the synchronic and diachronic research, and to examine the literary work as projected on a diachronic scale, in relation to its past and contemporary perspective. In this case, literary history assumes the effort of finding ways to innovate its discourse by getting support from other disciplines of humanities, such as cultural anthropology, social history, sociology, linguistics, and cultural studies, and especially from the most recent and world-wide acknowledged theoretical and critical modalities of the more adjacent to literary history domains of literary theory and literary criticism.

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