

Towards an Aphorematics – A Study on Aphorism

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Abstract: The paper aspires to propose, for the literary community, a new perspective on the literary genre called aphorism, namely, a logical perspective. The paper has two parts: the first one addresses the concept and typology of aphorism as a literary genre, and the second addresses the issue of literary critics on the aphorism. In the first part, the general/abstract concept of literariness is clarified, based on sufficiency predicates. Then, a set of five criteria to classify the literary genres is proposed and, based on them, 25 literary categories are established. The literary genre is built as a five-dimensional literary space, and the aphorism is described in such a way. This propaedeutic allows to provide three findings: the necessary and contingent features of the aphorism, the definition of the aphorism, and an own/new typology of the aphorism. The second part is dedicated to the issue of literary criticism – to this end, firstly, the literary criticism is integrated in the general critique theory, as a literary critique theory, which is defined based, also, on sufficiency predicates. Then, a typology of literary criticism is provided, which allows one to argue the very possibility of a literary criticism of the aphorism.

Keywords: literariness, aphorism, literary theory, literary criticism, aesthetics, poietics

I. The aphorism as a literary genre

1.1. Preamble

Like any form of creation (including scientific or theological creation), literary creation was, in the beginning, spontaneous, intuitive, non-deliberative and generated by practical inter-actions (*Nota bene*: by practical inter-actions we mean those inter-actions which involve subject-subject relations, as distinct from theoretical inter-actions – object-object relations, respectively praxiological inter-actions – subject-object relations). Gradually, as the role and functions of literary works expanded and became more important in the construction and reconstruction of the person and society, the need to theorize the literary creation, respectively the literary work, was felt. The theory also addressed the typology of literary creation, in addition to issues regarding writing (poietics), reception, hermeneutics, etc. The basic typology in the field of literary creation concerns literary genres. In the present communication, we try to examine the aphorism as a literary genre (namely, to examine whether or not the aphorism represents a distinct literary genre within the multitude of literary genres).

1.2. About literacy/literariness

Literary creation is a creation (that is, a novelty in the field of reality) based on words. However, not every text (i.e., discourses that uses words – *Nota bene*: there are semantic discourses that use gestures, such as dance, or sounds, such as music, etc.) can be considered a literary text. For example, the per-locutionary sentence "Get out!" also uses words but can hardly be considered a literary text (unless it represents a dialogical phrase in a novel). So, in a literary text, as the name suggests, we must have or find, for example, through interpretation, a property that we call *literarity/literariness*. We have, therefore, to clarify the predicate of (written from now on) literacy. There are many proposals in specialized literature (literary theory or philosophy of literature) regarding the

definition of literarity: deviation from the norm (Russian formalists, e.g., Jakobson), the presence of metaphor, (possible) polysemy in reception, (possible) transfer between meanings/referentials, multiple meanings (primary, secondary, tertiary), alternate worlds to the real world, etc. A logical definition of literarity (L) could be based on the following sufficiency predicates:

- ($L1$) *literality* – the discourse consists of words organized according to pre-existing valid syntactic rules (i.e., there is a text – we ignore, here, Derrida's somewhat over-generalizing claims regarding, for example, the cinematographic... text) ;
- ($L2$) *deviation* – words, phrases, sentences, phrases, narratives are meta-signs i.e., signs of signs, which means the possibility of semantic deviation from common language, acceptance of figures of style, etc. The deviation of the literal text from the common language or meaning is seen, by most linguistic or literary theorists, as a *conditio sine qua non* of literarity;
- ($L3$) *aesthetical closure* – the text has an aesthetic function, both through its syntagmatic form and through its paradigmatic structure. Having an aesthetic function means having the ability to trigger, during its reception, some emotions (affects), transfigurations (substitutions of the referentials), transpositions (substitutions of worlds) and the like.

So, literarity can be defined as that *property of a semantic discourse that has the form of a text consisting of aesthetically closed meta-signs*. From a formal point of view, we have:

$$L = (L1) \wedge (L2) \wedge (L3)$$

1.3. The literary categories – a typology

In order to answer the question whether aphorism can constitute a literary genre (or can be constituted as such), the concept of literary category must be discussed first, directly answering the question: what a literary category is it? We will present, next, some considerations in this matter.

- (i) a literary category represents a class of productions/creations characterized by *literarity* (L) – this is the proximate genre (in Aristotelian terminology)
- (ii) specific differences are classified as follows:
 - (α) according to the *degree of substitution* of the real world with imaginary worlds – the degree in which the literary work replaces the "laws" of the world of life with its own "laws", that are not rationally deducible, therefore they are unpredictable, and thus makes an imaginary world work, based on new "laws";
 - (β) according to *intentionality* – refers to the effect intended by the author (we do not insist here on the problem of the author, so controversial since the first structuralists) on the receiver/generic reader;
 - (γ) according to the *degree of narrative closure* – refers to the prosodic modality (poetic, diegetic, scenic) in which the literary work in question was developed;
 - (δ) according to the *modality of "production"* – refers to the concrete, particular form that the literary text takes, for communication with the receiver;
 - (ϵ) according to the *receptive modality* – refers to the way in which the recipient of the literary work (the receiver, the reader, the hearer) accesses the literary work in question.

Based on the five specific criteria (differences), a typology of literary categories can be elaborated, based on which then will be framed or "legitimated", the literary genres and, based on the latter, the literary species. *Nota bene*:

of course, we will highlight only the "pure" categories, but a certain literary genre may have characteristics from several categories of the same criterion – e.g., in the case of criterion α , we can have science fiction literature, i.e., a combination between $\alpha(1)$ and $\alpha(5)$, see below. In this way, any literary genre will have five characteristics of affiliation/belonging, each of them corresponding to each criterion.

- according to the *degree of substitution* of the real world with imaginary worlds (α)
 - $\alpha(1)$ category of realism/cutting up
 - $\alpha(2)$ category of imaginary/possible
 - $\alpha(3)$ category of mythical/foundational
 - $\alpha(4)$ category of mystical/supra-natural
 - $\alpha(5)$ category of fantastic/fanciful
- according to *intentionality* (β)
 - $\beta(1)$ category of ontological/descriptive
 - $\beta(2)$ category of moralist/normative
 - $\beta(3)$ category of comic/burlesque
 - $\beta(4)$ category of sentential/judicative
 - $\beta(5)$ category of utopic/dystopic
- according to the *degree of narrative closure* (γ)
 - $\gamma(1)$ category of epic/transformational
 - $\gamma(2)$ category of lyrical/poetical
 - $\gamma(3)$ category of prosaic/linearly
 - $\gamma(4)$ category of tragic/dilemmatic
 - $\gamma(5)$ category of dramatical/constructive
- according to the *modality of "production"* (δ)
 - $\delta(1)$ category of philosophical/theoretical
 - $\delta(2)$ category of phenomenological/intuitive
 - $\delta(3)$ category of diegetic/narrative
 - $\delta(4)$ category of fragmented/essay
 - $\delta(5)$ category of flashy/singular
- according to the *receptive modality* (ϵ)
 - $\epsilon(1)$ category of lecturing/reading
 - $\epsilon(2)$ category of recitative/audio
 - $\epsilon(3)$ category of representational/exhibition
 - $\epsilon(4)$ category of critical/deconstructive
 - $\epsilon(5)$ category of hermeneutical/idiosyncratic

1.4. Extracting the literary genre

Based on the literary categories, any literary genre can be defined as belonging to those categories. If a particular type of literary creation does not find its five categorical "anchors", then that creation does not (cannot) constitute a literary genre. If we denote by G any literary genre, then it has the following logical formula: $G[\alpha(\cdot), \beta(\cdot), \gamma(\cdot), \delta(\cdot), \varepsilon(\cdot)]$, where $(\cdot) \in \{1, 2, 3, 4, 5\}$. For example, the *love poem* will be described as:

$$G[\alpha(2), \beta(1), \gamma(2), \delta(4, 5), \varepsilon(1, 2)]$$

Nota bene: the literary category ε is represented by two anchors: $\varepsilon(1)$ – the love poem can be lectured/read by the receiver – respectively by $\varepsilon(2)$ – the love poem can be recited by someone for the receiver. In the categories where the numerical value is represented by $(\cdot)$, it means that that category can take, as the case may be, any numerical value among the five, including several of them or even all of them.

Analogously, the *novel* can be defined as follows:

$$G[\alpha(\cdot), \beta(\cdot), \gamma(3), \delta(1, 2, 3), \varepsilon(1, 2)]$$

In turn, the scenic work (more precisely, the literary creation that is elaborated as a play) has the following logical definition:

$$G[\alpha(\cdot), \beta(1, 2, 5), \gamma(1, 4, 5), \delta(3), \varepsilon(3)]$$

The same can be done for all literary genres known which are now accepted as such, both by authors and receivers, without a logical-conceptual foundation, as we propose here. The great advantage of the proposed procedure for identifying and defining literary genres lies in the fact that it can identify literary genres that do not exist (yet) but which, from a conceptual point of view, could exist, thus being a generative mechanism of literary genres, or of prosodic invention – *Nota bene*: the proposed logical scheme works analogously to the operation of Mendeleev's table for chemical elements.

Various analyses can, of course, be carried out based on the suggested logical definitional formulas. We list some of them, only enunciatively, without developing them in the present paper:

- categorical overlaps between genres – for example, between (love) poetry and theatrical piece, we have categorical overlaps at the $\beta(1)$ criterion: the ontological/descriptive category;
- the greater the number of categorical numerical values "accessed" by a literary genre, the greater the degree of creative freedom of that literary genre (or rather, of the author who creates within that literary genre) – e.g., theatrical piece has more creative freedom than poetry, from the perspective of criterion γ (the degree of narrative closure of the literary work);
- if the categorical numerical values of one literary genre encompass the categorical numerical values of another literary genre (on a different categorical criteria), then it can be said that, taxonomically, the second literary genre is, in fact, a literary species of the first literary genre – for example, poetry, as a literary genre, includes theatrical piece as a *sui generis* species from the perspective of the ε criterion (the receptive modality of the literary work);
- if a certain criterion exhausts all the categorical numerical values of a given criterion (that is, we have the writing: $x(\cdot)$, where $x \in \{\alpha, \beta, \gamma, \delta, \varepsilon\}$), then it can be said, about that literary genre, that it is a universal literary genre from the perspective of the respective criterion – e.g., the novel is a universal literary genre from the perspective of the criterion α (the degree of substitution of the real world with imaginary worlds).

1.5. How to define the aphorism?

First of all, defining the aphorism involves checking its literarity. Thus, it is worth noting that the aphorism verifies the conditions of literarity, namely: (a) it is *literal* (it is expressed in words); (b) consists of *meta-signs* or contains at least one meta-sign – see the "natural" ambiguity of any aphorism; (c) is *aesthetically closed* – it has a textual form subject to syntagmatic and paradigmatic rules. So the aphorism is literary because it has the property of literarity.

Secondly, as much as possible, the (literal) definition of the aphorism should respect the syntax of the aphorism, for example, be concise, which we will do in point 6.

1.6. The basic features of the aphorism

From an empirical point of view, and on a comparative historical basis, we can systematize the basic (principal) characteristics of the aphorism:

(i) necessary (mandatory) features

- it is *fragmentary* – the aphorism does not build a narrative text, but presents itself more as a flashy, fulgurant observation/finding/meditation;
- it is *intuitive* – the aphorism does not offer an explanation, but a plausibility, it does not offer a truthfulness, but a verisimilitude;
- it is *sentential* – the aphorism contains a topic of a judicial type (*res iudicatae*), like a label/brand; often, it appears as a reasoning;
- it is *apodictic* – by form and content, the aphorism does not admit (or does not seem to admit) objections or criticism, it presents itself as an irrefutable result in all aspects;
- it is *linguistically closed* – updates (additions, deletions, changes) of the text will rather diminish the connotative force of the aphoristic text than increase it;
- is *hermeneutically open* – the aphorism is, in the most direct way, the hypostasis of the Eco-ian concept of open work.

(ii) contingent (possible and non-necessary) features

- it is *elliptical* – the aphorism lacks (more precisely, it may lack) some syntactic grammatical elements;
- it is *normative* – the aphorism aspires to formulate rules of behavior in accordance with its evaluative content (it is about a non-imperative, purely indicative normativity);
- it is *meta-logical* – the aphorism presents itself, from a logical point of view, (as a rule) as an incomplete syllogism – it lacks either the major premise or the minor premise, often both, and the aphorism appears as a conclusion from "nothing" (or from "sea foam");
- it is *succinct* – the aphorism will pursue (as I said, not necessarily) a concentrated expression, limited to the basic meaning desired to be expressed, based on the Ockham razor (*Nota bene*: the feature of ellipticity also helps in this direction).

1.7. A definition of the aphorism

Based on the above, we can now try to formulate a (logical, non-historical) definition of the aphorism. The aphorism is *a fragmentary, semi-discursive (intuitive) literary text, having an apodictic character, a hermeneutic*

function and a sentential purpose. As can be seen, there are non-essential the aspects that the literature often lists in relation to the aphorism, such as:

- the *brevity of the text*: the size of the text is not essential (*Nota bene*: Nietzsche or Wittgenstein or Sartre or Alexandru Dragomir have long textual formulations which remain, as quiddity, aphorisms);
- the *philosophical content*: the condition that the aphoristic text concerns philosophical/metaphysical issues, is also not relevant for the qualification of that text as an aphorism;
- the *prescription of rules of conduct*: although some aphorisms are normative, this condition is not of the *conditio sine qua non* type for qualifying a text as an aphorism.

1.8. Framing the aphorism as literary genre

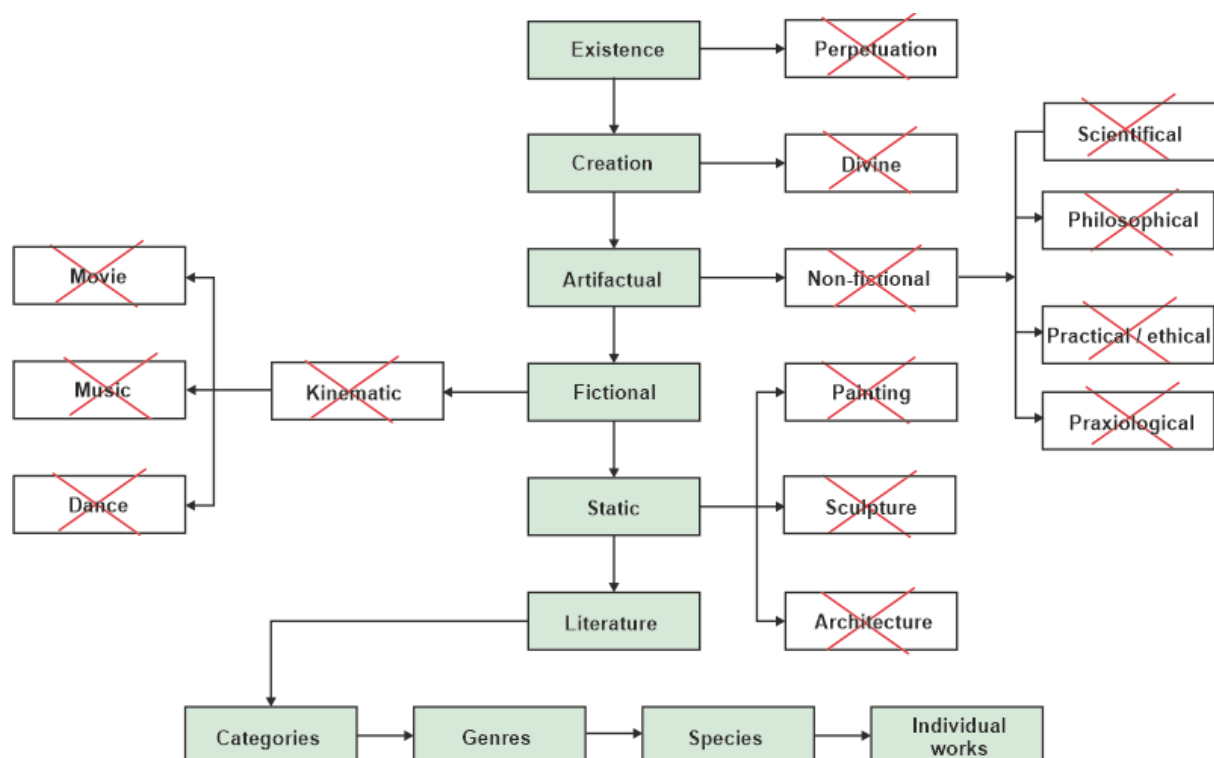
The "5x5 map" of literary categories (point 3) allows, after the definition of the aphorism has been formulated, the categorization of the aphorism as a literary genre. Thus, the logical formula of the literary genre called aphorism is:

$$G[\alpha(2), \beta(4), \gamma(2), \delta(5), \varepsilon(1,4,5)]$$

Since the aphorism could be described as a literary genre by taking numerical values from each conceptually identified literary category, it irrefutably follows that the aphorism is (and must be accepted) as a distinct literary genre.

1.9. A structural tree of creation – the place of literary genre

I will present a structural tree/scheme regarding the logical framing of the literary genre.



1.10. A (possible) typology of aphorism

In order to establish a typology of the aphorism (that is, to establish species within this literary genre), the criteria for typology (classification) of the aphorism must firstly be established. We propose the following criteria, respectively species (classes) of aphorism extracted based on them:

(1) (φ) according to the content or intended purpose:

- $\varphi(1)$ – *cognitive* aphorism: aims to produce/share knowledge, either from experience or from reflection (wisdom) – e.g.: "Intuition is knowing without knowing";
- $\varphi(2)$ – *normative* aphorism: aims to recommend principles/behaviors in individual and community life, from various perspectives: survival, effectiveness, morality, humanity, connection with divinity, etc. – e.g.: "The ostensiveness is stronger than the explanation";
- $\varphi(3)$ – *hermeneutic* aphorism: aims to provide interpretations of habits, regularities, traditions, likely to target wisdom, etc. – e.g.: "Wisdom presupposes intelligence, intelligence does not presuppose wisdom";
- $\varphi(4)$ – *self-reflexive* aphorism: seeks to formulate some conclusions relative to... aphorism; e.g.: "Aphorism is a conclusion that lacks premises";
- $\varphi(5)$ – *causal* aphorism: follows the causal argumentation of states, processes, contexts, etc. e.g.: "The morning is not determined by the night, although it follows the night";

(2) (θ) according to the *syntagmatic* form used (joining – horizontal linear combination):

- $\theta(1)$ – aphorism of *pun* type: uses puns based on synonymy, homonymy, paronymy and the like – e.g.: "Dry wine makes the head dry";
- $\theta(2)$ – aphorism of *paradox/contradiction* type: uses paradoxical formulations which, *prima facie*, seem implausible/unbelievable – e.g.: "Everything is relative";
- $\theta(3)$ – aphorism of *definition* type: uses definitional, strongly apodictic formulations – e.g.: "Love means a fullness that must find its emptiness";
- $\theta(4)$ – aphorism of *syllogistic* type: uses logical formulations (premises - conclusions) – e.g.: "Post hoc, ergo propter hoc";
- $\theta(5)$ – aphorism of *metaphorical* type: uses metaphorical formulations – e.g.: "Inner fire does not emit smoke".

(3) (ρ) according to the *paradigmatic* form used (substitution – vertical linear combination):

- $\rho(1)$ aphorism by *analogy* – semantically analogous terms are substituted, according to the intended purpose – e.g.: "The blood of the economy grows from itself" (*Nota bene*: with reference to money, consider as the blood of the economy);
- $\rho(2)$ aphorism by *symbolization* – one term is substituted with another that represents a symbol of the first term – e.g.: "Carrying your cross is not an obligation, but a necessity" (*Nota bene*: the term cross symbolizes the term duty, respectively the expression "to carry your cross" symbolizes the expression "to do your duty");
- $\rho(3)$ aphorism by *transfiguration* – terms are substituted, according to the intended purpose, which, from a semantic point of view, are mutually distorted – e.g.: "The mountain is a cap that the plain puts on in winter" (*Nota bene*: the mountain is transfigured into a cap);

- ($\rho 4$) aphorism through *pareidolia* – (*Nota bene*: it is about textual/linguistic pareidolia, not about iconic pareidolia) terms that are in pareidolic textual relations with each other are substituted – e.g.: "Entering the collision could be legal but is immoral" (*Nota bene*: the term collusion – i.e., a tacit pact to behave dishonestly – is read/perceived/judged, pareidolic, like collision);
- $\rho 5$) aphorism by *synecdoche* – the part is substituted with the whole, the individual with the species, the species with the genus, the cause with the effect, the substance with the form, etc. – e.g.: "The human individual is condemned to freedom" (*Nota bene*: the expression "human individual" – the part – stands for the term "humanity" – the whole). Comment: transfiguration and pareidolia are distinct concepts from one another: transfiguration is an intentional act (usually artistical), while pareidolia (linguistical) is a non-intentional act, but based on an error of phonetic or semantic perception, as the case may be);

(4) (μ) according to the *aesthetic* form used:

- $\mu 1$) aphorism in *elliptical* form – the aphorism lacks syntactic elements (grammatical, not logical), which leads to the achievement of a given aesthetic effect – e.g.: "So much sadness, so much poetry";
- $\mu 2$) aphorism in *poetic* form – the aphorism is elaborated either in the form of a poem (with fixed or free form), or in prosaic form but with elements of implicit poetry – e.g.: "In the antediluvian trail of a dinosaur, I see the uncertain shadow of my face"; ;
- $\mu 3$) aphorism in *philosophical* form – the aphorism has an extremely abstract, conceptual form, with universal validity – e.g.: "Through man, the world of life (Lebenswelt) becomes self-reflexive";
- $\mu 4$) aphorism in *logical* form – the aphorism is stated in an *a priori*, a-contextual manner – e.g.: "Science is agnostic, so knowledge is always negative";
- $\mu 5$) aphorism in *dialogical* form – the aphorism is exposed through an explicit or implicit dialogue – e.g.: "I am what I am, says God. I am what I will become, answers the man";

(5) (λ) according to the *linguistic* form used:

- $\lambda 1$) *cataphatic* aphorism – the aphorism is expressed affirmatively – e.g.: "Empathy is the path that leads to the other";
- $\lambda 2$) *apophatic* aphorism – the aphorism is expressed negatively – e.g.: "God cannot be changeable";
- $\lambda 3$) *doubtful* aphorism – the aphorism is expressed in a problematic way – e.g.: "To be or not to be – this is the question";
- $\lambda 4$) *inter-textual* aphorism – the aphorism is expressed by "convoking" other texts – e.g.: "There is no need to learn to die, because death is unrepeatable". *Nota bene*: the text convoked is the Eminescian verse from "Ode in ancient meter": *I did not think I would ever learn to die*;
- $\lambda 5$) *interrogative* aphorism – the aphorism is expressed by a question – e.g.: "If everything is mortal, does eternity have being?".

So, from the point of view of the "pure" forms of the "5x5 map", there can be, in the present approach, 25 species of the literary genre called aphorism but, obviously, in literary practice, other combinations can be formed that will increase this number. Theoretically, we could accept the 25 species as the basic (or primary) species of the

aphorism, with various combinations of the basic species leading to derived (or secondary) species of the aphorism. A deepening of the reflection in the present material will be able to lead to the identification of a (presumably) complete "map" of the species belonging to the literary genre called aphorism. *Nota bene*: of course, some combinations could constitute *contradictiones in praedicatis* and will have to be eliminated.

Based on this descriptive "5x5 map" scheme, any generic aphorism can be rigorously defined, in terms of its membership to the five identified species, as follows:

$$A = [\varphi(\cdot), \theta(\cdot), \rho(\cdot), \mu(\cdot), \lambda(\cdot)]$$

For the case of a particular aphorism, for example, the aphoristic "individual": *Non idem est si duo audiunt idem*, the generic formula receives the following numerical values of special belonging (that is, relating to species):

$$A = [\varphi(3), \theta(2), \rho(2), \mu(3), \lambda(2)]$$

II. Can exist a literary critique on the aphorism?

2.1. The critical theory

The concept of criticism is rather vaguely defined, even in reference works, being considered, as in the case of many other concepts of general use, as self-evident. On the other hand, this state of affairs can also be explained by the fact that, in accordance with the Wittgenstein-ian reluctance regarding the clarification of terms (respectively, of concepts) it is assumed that the meaning of a term results, in the most meaningful way, from its use (especially from usage in common language). Of course, in the present material, we will proceed to a somewhat more... rigorous examination of the concept of criticism.

There are several well-known and highly articulated approaches to the concept of criticism or, rather, critical theory (which, however, we will not examine here). The first approach and the one that gave the general coordinates of the concept is, of course, Kant's critical theory, through his three "Critiques" (of pure reason, practical reason and judgmental reason). There was, secondly, the critical theory of the Frankfurt School, represented especially by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer (but inspired by the critical contributions developed by Hegel, Marx or Freud). A third approach is made by the philosopher of science and logician Karl Popper, through his theory of critical rationalism related to the testability of scientific hypotheses. The contributions from philosophy (Heidegger – regarding the critique of the concept of being; Sartre – regarding the critique of the concept of nothingness; Michel Foucault – regarding historicism and the archeology of knowledge; Jacques Derrida – regarding deconstruction) or linguistics (the structuralists and Chomsky, *inter alia*, the last especially for his generative grammar).

An operational, not necessarily fundamental, definition of critical theory could be the following: *a critical theory is a theory that proceeds to examine an object of knowledge through deconstruction, i.e. by highlighting: (1) primary foundations (substratum), (2) sufficient justifications and (3) implicit assumptions*. In the last instance (i.e., by...deconstruction) any critical theory that claims to be so called can be shown to have one, two, or all three of the approaches mentioned in the operational definition.

Based on this definition of a critical theory in general, we will now proceed to highlight the content of literary critical theory (or, by ellipsis, of literary criticism – *Nota bene*: most of the time, the phrase "literary criticism" means the activity of application of literary critical theory but, sometimes, it is a small abbreviation even for the expression literary critical theory). So, critical theory will be considered the proximate genre, so, to identify literary critical theory we will have to highlight the specific differences.

2.2. The concept of literary critical theory

2.2.1. A definition of literary critical theory

Although, from a logical point of view, literary critical theory is a species of the genre of critical theory, it must be said that, from a historical point of view, critical theory was built with literary critical theory itself as a prototype (and, in part, sociological critical theory, especially the Marxist one). To define literary critical theory (*LCT*) we need to identify the sufficiency predicates of this concept. The first sufficiency predicate will be represented by the proximate genus itself, mentioned above, and the other sufficiency predicates will be represented by the specific differences (in their minimal number, based on Ockham's razor). The list of sufficiency predicates of literary critical theory are as follows:

- (*LCT/0*) is a *critical theory* – *LCT* must be a critical type theory, i.e., to proceed according to the definition previously given for critical theory in general – point 2.1);
- (*LCT/1*) the object of the *LCT* is the literary text – this means that the *LCT* targets only those texts that have the property of literarity; I remind that literarity means the following: (a) literality; (b) deviation (text signs are meta-signs); (c) aesthetic closure (the text has an aesthetic function);
- (*LCT/2*) the purpose of *LCT* is the reconstruction of the aesthetic vision (or aesthetic program) contained in the literary work – this means that *LCT* uses a procedure based on the deconstruction-reconstruction pair. An approach that remains at the stage of deconstruction is not fully literary criticism (as an activity) and certainly not a *LCT* (as an epistemological foundation).

Based on the proposed sufficiency predicates, *LCT* can be defined as follows: *that critical theory having as object: the literary text, as method: aesthetic deconstruction, and as goal: aesthetic reconstruction.*

The logical formula of literary critical theory (*LCT*) is:

$$LCT \leftarrow (LCT/0) \wedge (LCT/1) \wedge (LCT/2)$$

2.2.2. Three problems of literary criticism

- (a) what is the object/entity examined by *LCT*?

LCT must examine the literary text as it is available as a literary work. The distinction between literary text and literary work is sufficiently pedantic and of no relevant added value at this stage of the discussion, so it will be ignored. As will be seen further on, the approaches present in *LCT* also target the author of the literary work (*Nota bene*: in the so-called post-modernism we also have the narrator, the character, as well as other...intermediaries as co-authors), the socio-history of the elaboration of the literary work, etc. but, essentially, the object of *LCT* is the literary work as it presents itself in its observable and accessible materiality (objectifying).

- (b) from what perspective *LCT* should view/examine its object of knowledge?

This is, probably, the most important question that can be asked about *LCT*. As in the case of any question, the answers abound and occupy the entire spectrum imaginable (a historical foray would be particularly instructive but, for the moment, such an approach will not be provided): the historical context, the unconscious of the author, the sociological or axiological framework, the stage of development of literature etc. We believe that the proper and legitimate perspective of *LCT* must predominantly be, beyond the inevitable, non-literary, interferences, the aesthetic perspective.

- (c) how does *LCT* display its "finished product"?

The answer to this question must, in fact, choose (on more or less... foundational grounds – I think it is a strongly idiosyncratic foundation) between two alternatives: (i) the *LCT* paper must be a scientific paper ; (ii) the *LCT* essay must be a literary essay. I will say a few words about each alternative:

- (i) the justification of this option – that is, for a scientific paper – consists in the very name of the "tool": namely, literary critical *theory*. A theory, regardless of its research object, must proceed scientifically (*Nota bene*: even theology, when it is not simple apologetics or hermeneutics, must have a scientific method). The ingredients of a scientific work are well-known (first of all, ensuring factual testability – that is, a testability applicable to the respective literary work – independent of the formulated hermeneutic hypotheses) and I will not insist on them. What I want to discuss concerns the arguments that could be made in supporting this critical modality. I believe these arguments should include the following:
 - *LCT* has to deliver a systematic, coherent and verifiable (independently, by other literary theorists) elucidation, regarding the literary work. If the first two effects – systematic character, and coherent character – do not imply scientificity, being proper to any analytical approach worthy of the name, the independent verifiability of hypotheses, methodology and conclusions clearly implies scientific character. This inter-personal validity of the operation of literary criticism therefore belongs to scientificity;
 - *LCT* must have a meta or at least para "status" in relation to the literary work (the object of literary criticism), which excludes the possibility that the "product" of literary criticism is a new... literary work. However, this remains an option (see point (ii) as well as the whole of point 2.3).
 - Logically, *LCT* delivering critical scientific products fall under 3rd order cybernetic systems – the observed object is an artefact and the observer is outside the observed object.

Of course, *LCT*, as a scientific work, must be classified under the appropriate species of scientific work.

- (ii) the justification of this option – that is, for a literary work – consists in the fact that, essentially, *LCT* is not external to the literary domain, but internal to it, without considering the fact that, quite often, literary critics are, themselves, literary authors (or vice versa). Always (and perhaps more recently) scientists have also been (or have become) men/women of letters, although the opposite phenomenon has not really been observed. In this context, the probability that a critical essay will take shape, and/or use the literary approach is relatively high. I bring two arguments in supporting this assertion:
 - some literary critics (perhaps quite a few, by weight) simply do not have the background or inclination to treat a work of literature scientifically, never mind that they might consider it unnatural to do so, out of a belief deeply rooted;
 - these literary critics might consider that it is, in fact, impossible to treat purely objectively, according to scientific templates, criteria, and tests, a highly subjective, idiosyncratic and, moreover, singular work (*Nota bene*: for example, these critics could "arm" themselves with the argument that scientism is applicable only to repeatable cases, and not to singular cases, such as that of the elaboration of a literary work).

From a logical point of view, *LCT*'s delivering critical literary products fall under 4th order cybernetic systems – the observed object is an artefact and the observer is inside the observed object.

Nota bene: 1st order cybernetic systems are those in which the observed object is natural and the observer is outside the object (e.g. systems studied by non-quantum physics), and 2nd order cybernetic systems are those in

which the observed object is natural and the observer is inside the object (e.g., the systems studied by quantum physics).

Of course, *LCT*, as a literary work, must be classified under the appropriate species of literary work.

My option (or my... preference), is that literary critical theory must conform to scientific constraints, so that the output of literary criticism must be a scientific "object" and not a literary object.

2.2.3. *A (possible) typology of literary critical theories*

In order to formulate a point of view regarding a typology of literary critical theories (or literary critics) it is necessary, of course, to establish a (minimal) set of criteria that would generate that typology. I propose the following set of criteria, namely the following classes (or species or critical paths) of *LCT* related to each criterion:

- (1) ($\tilde{\alpha}$) the *object* criterion – refers to the object on which the critical approach is performed. According to this criterion, there can be the following classes of *LCT*:
 - $\tilde{\alpha}(1)$ naked literary work – the critical approach is exercised on the literary work itself, without any anchoring in aspects, contexts, determinations, influences, etc. of non-literary kind
 - $\tilde{\alpha}(2)$ the entire literary creation of an author – the critical approach is exercised over the entire literary creation of an author
 - $\tilde{\alpha}(3)$ the whole of the literary creation of a specific era or period – the critical approach is exercised over the entire literary creation, of all authors from a given literary space (e.g.: a region of a country, a country, a cultural space – Europe, America, Africa)
 - $\tilde{\alpha}(4)$ the set of literary creation related to a literary genre, literary species, etc. – the critical approach is exercised over the entire creation, of all relevant authors for that literary genre or literary species (poetry, theater, novel, epigram, aphorism, etc.)
 - $\tilde{\alpha}(5)$ the set of literary creation related to a literary current, literary school, literary fashion, etc. – the critical approach is exercised over the entire related creation (according to pre-established qualification or membership criteria) of a certain trend, school, fashion, etc. (e.g.: post-modernist poetry, the novel *mise en abyme*).
- (2) ($\tilde{\beta}$) the *context* criterion – refers to the extra-literary conditionalities that accompanied the elaboration of the literary work. According to this criterion the following classes of *LCT* can exist:
 - $\tilde{\beta}(1)$ the social/political/cultural context – the specific conditions in society, which influence the literary creation and the very life of the author
 - $\tilde{\beta}(2)$ the paradigmatic context – the schools, currents, waves that condition the elaboration of the literary work
 - $\tilde{\beta}(3)$ the auctorial context – biography, from various perspectives, of the author, which impacts the intentionality, writing and reception of the literary work
 - $\tilde{\beta}(4)$ the context of anteriority – the previous work of the author as an explanatory or comprehensive factor (causal or conditional) of the literary work in question
 - $\tilde{\beta}(5)$ context of singularity – a particular occurrence or event (both unpredictable) that affected the author or the society in which the author lived.
- (3) ($\tilde{\gamma}$) the *method* criterion – refers to the methodology used by *LCT* to examine and elucidate its object. According to this criterion the following classes of *LCT* can exist:

- $\tilde{\gamma}(1)$ the phenomenological/intuitionist approach – uses the tool of intentionality (of the literary critic, not of the author) in sensing the eidos of the object of criticism
 - $\tilde{\gamma}(2)$ the sociological-historical approach – uses the tool, techniques and conclusions of sociology and historical evolutionism, in critical analysis
 - $\tilde{\gamma}(3)$ the psychological/psychoanalytical approach – uses the tool and results obtained in the psychology and psychoanalysis of creation
 - $\tilde{\gamma}(4)$ the hermeneutic approach – uses the method of conferring meanings and/or signification on the object of criticism, based on symbolic and coding systems
 - $\tilde{\gamma}(5)$ the structural approach – uses the function-generating structure method, that is considering that a literary work has certain functions based on a certain internal structure of various types (see Vladimir Propp's work on the fairy tale, or Barthes' theories)
- (4) ($\tilde{\delta}$) the criterion of *form* – aims at the "finished product" obtained through the critical approach. According to this criterion the following classes of *LCT* can exist:
- $\tilde{\delta}(1)$ impressionistic criticism – the product of criticism is relatively unfaithful to the work examined, representing additions or distortions produced, at the level of critical examination, by the very reception of the literary work in question (*Nota bene*: the problem of the receiver's "participation" in the "writing" of the literary work – see, again, the clamors and excesses of post-modernism)
 - $\tilde{\delta}(2)$ poetic criticism – the product of critics is a literary object, liable, in turn, to a literary criticism... of the 2nd order, according to the methodology proposed in Chapter 1
 - $\tilde{\delta}(3)$ aesthetic criticism – the product of criticism is an examination subject strictly toward aesthetic criteria (aesthetic value, aesthetic function, inter-textuality and the like)
 - $\tilde{\delta}(4)$ scientific criticism – the product of the criticism is a logically rigorous, and a socially testable result
 - $\tilde{\delta}(5)$ philosophical criticism – the product of criticism is connected to and anchored in notable philosophical results (e.g., the problem of Being/being, connected to phenomenology or existentialism, etc.)
- (5) ($\tilde{\epsilon}$) the criterion of purpose – aims at the finality/intentionality pursued by the critical approach. According to this criterion the following classes of *LCT* can exist:
- $\tilde{\epsilon}(1)$ welcome criticism – the aim is to signal, for readers (literary receivers) a literary work and/or an author (critical exegesis is restricted to the descriptive/expository/illustrative aspects)
 - $\tilde{\epsilon}(2)$ recognition criticism – the aim is to argue the place that a work and/or an author occupies in a literary genre, literary species or in the overall literary creation of a society/nation
 - $\tilde{\epsilon}(3)$ canonization criticism – the goal is to consecrate a literary work and/or an author as canonical (*Nota bene*: by canonization we mean the verification of the criteria of exemplarity (which, of course, must be pre-defined)
 - $\tilde{\epsilon}(4)$ re-evaluation criticism – the goal is the critical re-analysis/re-reading of a literary work, or/and an author or/and the entire literary creation of that author, from the perspective of changing the current perception of that work/creation or of that author

- $\tilde{\epsilon}(5)$ framing criticism – the goal is to argue the placement of a literary work, an author or the whole of an author's literary creation within currents, schools, creative techniques, etc. (*Nota bene*: framing does not necessarily mean canonization, although it does not exclude it).

2.2.4. The peculiarities of aphorism as a literary genre

We referred to the content of the aphorism as a literary genre in Chapter 1 (pt. 1.6). We will resume, from that point, the definition, the logical formula and the peculiarities of the aphorism:

- definition of aphorism: *a fragmentary, semi-discursive (intuitive) literary text, having an apodictic character, a hermeneutic function and a sentential purpose.*
- logical formula of aphorism:

$G[\alpha(2), \beta(4), \gamma(2), \delta(5), \epsilon(1,4,5)]$, namely:

- $\alpha(2)$: refers to the imaginary/possible
- $\beta(4)$: it is sentential/judicative
- $\gamma(2)$: it is from the lyrical/poetic category
- $\delta(5)$: its expression is of the lightning/singular type
- $\epsilon(1,4,5)$: $\epsilon(1)$ – it is perceptible by reading/reading; $\epsilon(4)$ – reception is critical/deconstructive, or $\epsilon(5)$ – the reception is of hermeneutic/idiosyncratic type.
- the peculiarities of aphorism:
 - (i) necessary (mandatory) features
 - it is *fragmentary* – the aphorism does not build a narrative text, but presents itself more as a flashy, fulgurant observation/finding/meditation;
 - it is *intuitive* – the aphorism does not offer an explanation, but a plausibility, it does not offer a truthfulness, but a verisimilitude;
 - it is *sentential* – the aphorism contains a topic of a judicial type (*res iudicatae*), like a label/brand; often, it appears as a reasoning;
 - it is *apodictic* – by form and content, the aphorism does not admit (or does not seem to admit) objections or criticism, it presents itself as an irrefutable result in all aspects;
 - it is *linguistically closed* – updates (additions, deletions, changes) of the text will rather diminish the connotative force of the aphoristic text than increase it;
 - is *hermeneutically open* – the aphorism is, in the most direct way, the hypostasis of the Eco-ian concept of open work.
 - (ii) contingent (possible and non-necessary) features
 - it is *elliptical* – the aphorism lacks (more precisely, it may lack) some syntactic grammatical elements;
 - it is *normative* – the aphorism aspires to formulate rules of behavior in accordance with its evaluative content (it is about a non-imperative, purely indicative normativity);

- it is *meta-logical* – the aphorism presents itself, from a logical point of view, (as a rule) as an incomplete syllogism – it lacks either the major premise or the minor premise, often both, and the aphorism appears as a conclusion from "nothing" (or from "sea foam");
- it is *succinct* – the aphorism will pursue (as I said, not necessarily) a concentrated expression, limited to the basic meaning desired to be expressed, based on the Ockham razor (*Nota bene*: the feature of ellipticity also helps in this direction).

2.3. The possibility of literary criticism of aphorism

We have seen what is meant by literary critical theory (or literary criticism) and we have also seen what is meant by aphorism as a literary genre. The question now arises of examining the framework in which literary criticism of the aphorism is possible.

The conditions of possibility refer to the logical choice (construction) of a "species" of literary criticism, based on the "5x5 map" proposed above, which has the potential to examine a literary object such as the aphorism. More precisely, it will be necessary that, based on the logical formula of the aphorism (see above), we can identify the numerical value, among the five values of each criterion of the *LCT*, which seems to be the most appropriate to the logical structure of the aphorism (*Nota bene*: of course, this method of choice can be used to determine the type of literary criticism "suitable" for any literary object – poetry, novel, theater, epigram, fable, etc.). We will organize this choice mechanism in Table 1 (we denote the aphorism with *A*). I specify that the table below is purely illustrative/exemplary, it does not constitute an in-depth investigation of the problem, but only indicates the technical way in which one can proceed in choosing the type (species) of *LCT* to be applied to the literary criticism of the aphorism.

Table 1. Construction of the type of *LCT* associated with the aphorism

<i>LCT</i> criterion	<i>LCT</i> numerical value	Logical formula of aphorism				
		$\alpha(2)$	$\beta(4)$	$\gamma(2)$	$\delta(5)$	$\varepsilon(1,4,5)$
$\tilde{\alpha}$	$\tilde{\alpha}(1)$	<i>A</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>A</i>
	$\tilde{\alpha}(2)$					
	$\tilde{\alpha}(3)$					
	$\tilde{\alpha}(4)$					
	$\tilde{\alpha}(5)$					
$\tilde{\beta}$	$\tilde{\beta}(1)$					
	$\tilde{\beta}(2)$					
	$\tilde{\beta}(3)$	<i>A</i>		<i>A</i>		<i>A</i>
	$\tilde{\beta}(4)$					
	$\tilde{\beta}(5)$		<i>A</i>		<i>A</i>	
$\tilde{\gamma}$	$\tilde{\gamma}(1)$		<i>A</i>	<i>A</i>		
	$\tilde{\gamma}(2)$					
	$\tilde{\gamma}(3)$				<i>A</i>	
	$\tilde{\gamma}(4)$	<i>A</i>				<i>A</i>
	$\tilde{\gamma}(5)$					
$\tilde{\delta}$	$\tilde{\delta}(1)$	<i>A</i>			<i>A</i>	
	$\tilde{\delta}(2)$			<i>A</i>		
	$\tilde{\delta}(3)$					
	$\tilde{\delta}(4)$					

	$\tilde{\delta}(5)$	A	A			A
$\tilde{\epsilon}$	$\tilde{\epsilon}(1)$	A	A		A	A
	$\tilde{\epsilon}(2)$					
	$\tilde{\epsilon}(3)$					
	$\tilde{\epsilon}(4)$					
	$\tilde{\epsilon}(5)$			A		

Source: the author

Discussion

- from the perspective of the $\tilde{\alpha}$ criterion, the *LCT* species must exclusively target the naked literary work, i.e., the mark $\tilde{\alpha}(1)$, so the aphorism as such, in its isolation – the "verdict" is unanimous regarding this criterion (it covers all five logical marks of the aphorism);
- from the perspective of the $\tilde{\beta}$ criterion, the majority (three out of five) fits target the $\tilde{\beta}(3)$ value;
- from the perspective of the $\tilde{\gamma}$ criterion, two marks, namely $\tilde{\gamma}(1)$ and $\tilde{\gamma}(4)$, respectively, have two appropriatenesses;
- from the perspective of the $\tilde{\delta}$ criterion, the numerical mark $\tilde{\delta}(5)$ is "qualified", with three choices;
- from the perspective of the $\tilde{\epsilon}$ criterion, the mark obtained is $\tilde{\epsilon}(1)$, with four matches out of five possible.

In conclusion, for the case of the aphorism, there can be two types of usable literary criticism:

$$LCT (1) = LCT [\tilde{\alpha}(1), \tilde{\beta}(3), \tilde{\gamma}(1), \tilde{\delta}(5), \tilde{\epsilon}(1)]$$

$$LCT (2) = LCT [\tilde{\alpha}(1), \tilde{\beta}(3), \tilde{\gamma}(4), \tilde{\delta}(5), \tilde{\epsilon}(1)]$$

that is:

- *LCT* (1): a critical literary theory that aims at the aphorism in its nakedness, contextualizes it in the general idiosyncrasy of the author, approaches it phenomenologically/intuitionistically, from a philosophical perspective, with the aim of signaling/welcoming;
- *LCT* (2): a critical literary theory that aims at the aphorism in its nakedness, contextualizes it in the general idiosyncrasy of the author, approaches it hermeneutically, from a philosophical perspective, with the aim of signaling/welcoming.

Since we have "found" two species of *LCT* (or two literary criticism paths), compatible, from a logical point of view, with the literary object called aphorism, it follows that, in principle, there can be a literary criticism of the aphorism (in fact, even two).