

ԳՐԱԽՈՍԱԿԱՆՆԵՐ BOOK REVIEWS



THE TEXTBOOK "THEORY AND AESTHETICS OF LITERATURE" AS A CONTEMPORARY NAVIGATOR

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In 2024, literary theorist and scholar Ashkhen Jrbashyan presented the Armenian-language textbook "Theory and Aesthetics of Literature" (Yerevan, YSU Publishing House, 2024, 316 pages, scientific editor: Prof. A. Makaryan), which explores the interrelations between general concepts and issues of literature and aesthetics, the place of literature among the arts, similarities and differences with other art forms, and more. The textbook is the result of long-term, thorough, and consistent research, which was created by Ashkhen Jrbashyan to facilitate the work of student readers, thus it implies their full involvement.

The primary *aim* of the textbook is to provide the readers with theoretical knowledge and enhance their aesthetic understanding, which is accessible in progressing from a *predetermined attitude of perception to freedom* or under *the sign of advancement*. At the same time, it involves a process of interpreting aesthetic principles through the issues that open-up in the book and make the context complete.

The textbook "Theory and Aesthetics of Literature" ...

The sections and key messages: Ashkhen Jrbashyan's textbook "Literary Theory and Aesthetics" consists of five chapters:

- a. "A Brief Overview of the History of Aesthetic Doctrines",
- b. "Literary and Artistic Trends in the Context of Aesthetics",
- c. "Art and Literary Schools of the 19th-20th Centuries",
- d. "Main Aesthetic Categories",
- e. "Literary Forms and Genres".

The book also includes "Preface" and "Introduction" sections, and extensive annotations in Russian and English. The section "Bibliography" contains important Armenian, Russian, and international scholarly sources.

In the *first* chapter, the author rigorously examined the historical development of aesthetic doctrines from *ancient world* to *modern theories*, while also presenting the link between literary theory to the main European philosophical and aesthetic trends.

The *second* chapter presents literary and artistic trends. Also, reference is made to Classicism, Nicolas Boileau's "The Art of Poetry", Sentimentalism, Romanticism, Realism, Naturalism, Avant-gardism, Surrealism, Existentialism, and others within an aesthetic framework.

In the *third* chapter, Mythological, Comparative, Psychological, Cultural-historical, Freudian criticism, Myth criticism, Formalism, Structuralism, and other schools of art and literary studies from the 19th-20th centuries are examined. These provide important insights into the development of international literary connections and global cultural contacts, fostering favorable conditions for the study of literatures, while at the same time attempts are made to explain the similarities present in different national cultures.

In the *fourth* chapter, the main aesthetic categories - such as the Beautiful, the Ugly, the Noble, the Ignoble, the Tragic, the Comic, and others - are interpreted under separate headings, focusing on their role and significance in a person's aesthetic perception of reality. The choice of these concepts is neither random nor arbitrary, as they complete the overall logic of the textbook as a structured system.

In the *fifth* chapter, the principles of classifying literary genres and forms, along with their distinguishing features, are examined in detail. These principles are particularly important for those dealing with poetics, who prioritize the

analysis of specific texts and the principle of classifying them within a particular typological group or discourse.

It is worth noting that all the materials included in the book are accompanied by relevant illustrations, which help enhance the reader's visual thinking (imagination).

Features: It is important to note certain features of the textbook "Theory of Literature and Aesthetics".

Each key section of the book is developed with a broad range of the author's perceptions and viewpoints, summarizing various intellectual traditions and cultures. These seem to compete in persuasiveness, sometimes supporting the reader, sometimes complementing or challenging each other. The author successfully combines literary theory and aesthetics with history, art studies, and several other disciplines, ensuring the interdisciplinary nature of the material. There is no chapter or section in the textbook where the priority is given solely to content or form. They are harmoniously interwoven in all sections.

The presented work is also a system of concepts and propositions that should be mastered (especially) by a philologist. After all, the aesthetic function of literature as an art form is sustainable. And this is intentional, because in literature and art the common is directly related to the individual. The author conveys the idea of literary theory-aesthetics interaction to the reader with available comments, highlighting all the shifts in the development of the field.

The Progression from Predetermined Perception to Freedom

The author employs the terms *literary theory* and *aesthetics* within the domain of knowledge-based juxtaposition rather than unifying superficiality. These concepts are distinguished not by an assumed elite level of theory but by their multi-layered meaning and versatility. This represents the demanding imperative of the advancement of the author's mind, which is accessible to the reader through the trick of gradual, slow, and careful release of the calculative and tight spring of the mind.

It is impossible not to refer to the fact that during such shifts of mind A. Jrbashyan creates neat and clear combinations through Greek, European and Russian schools and authors. Whatever material is available in the book in the Armenian language is available with high accuracy. This is precisely *the progression from the predetermined attitude of perception to scientific freedom*.

The textbook "Theory and Aesthetics of Literature" ...

The logical chain of the material is skillfully maintained between the explained general categories and knowledge-based multiple meanings until the end of the reading, although the goal is also to provide additional details to the reader through verbal techniques. In this way, the author makes the dynamism of the material accessible as well.

It is noteworthy that theoretician Jrbashyan's viewpoint and system of preferences are not concealed behind multiple citations, as often happens, although it is indeed difficult, if not impossible, to avoid such cross-influences of ideas.

Each independent thesis of the author adds significant weight to the textbook, as the conceptual maturity present in it does not impose limitations but rather invites effective thinking based on principles of synthesis and is open to the reader. This characteristic of Jrbashyan's writing style leads to a free approach to the topic, which is valuable for the theoretician in terms of a *sense of play*.

It should be noted that although aesthetics has evolved, it has traveled a long path while preserving the unchanged core of philosophical and aesthetic knowledge or the domain of art philosophy perceived through other aesthetic categories. In this regard, the presentation of theory and aesthetics in the textbook is supported by convincing examples. The book is written with clear and logical solutions and includes foreign-language (Russian and English) literature characteristic of contemporary studies. The author's approach to working with the reader can also be considered as an advantage of the book: she calculates and completes the comprehensive picture of contemporary approaches to the subject and research.

Using *hybrid structures* (M.M. Bakhtin), the author does not interweave, but embeds the text, creating a *chain system* within a *chain system* and emphasizing the functions, principles and techniques of writing.

Conclusion: Ashkhen Jrbashyan's textbook "Theory of Literature and Aesthetics" helps to gain a deeper knowledge about literature and mastery of the principles and techniques of aesthetic analysis. It is both conceptual and logical. The book contains interdisciplinary materials based on fundamental humanities that are recommended for students of philology, journalism, foreign languages, and Oriental studies at universities to make their work during lectures more comprehensible and manageable. It also provides necessary and valuable


theoretical and aesthetic knowledge for high school teachers and students within the context of modern reforms.

The textbook is a novelty due to its distinctive nature, the diversity of thoroughly explained materials, and is useful for Armenian scholars, researchers dealing with issues in the theory of literature and aesthetics, students and postgraduates of philological faculties, as well as specialists in art studies and related scientific fields.

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