

## Neo-Aristotelian Criticism in the U. S. A.: The Chicago School: Contribution to a Basic Bibliography\*

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### ABSTRACT

In this bibliographic essay I first give some of the reasons that, in my opinion, had led to the lack of knowledge about the Chicago School as regards the Literary Criticism. Afterwards I have prepared a basic bibliography on Neo-Aristotelians, which up to the present time, has been little known due to its dispersion and lack of organization in a general project. The primary sources show an intellectual activity which has been both long and huge, regarding time and its interests respectively; whereas the secondary sources embody a fair view of the response that the Chicago School has been given throughout the years. This bibliography is meant to be neither exhaustive nor critic, but a first serious approach to the theoretical and critical activity of a group of scholars which common interests who are a very important milestone in the 20th-century American literary criticism.

### Introduction

The Chicago School of criticism, also known as “the Chicago critics” or “Neo-Aristotelians,” stands, in the American theoretical and critical panorama, for an outstanding period that unfortunately has not attracted our country’s attention.<sup>1</sup> Although, due to the aim of this essay, this is not the time to take into account every cause that has led to this lack of attention and, even, ignorance, we will point out briefly those that in our opinion are the most important ones.<sup>2</sup>

a. The dominant role played by the New Criticism, which has been traditionally considered as the most relevant theoretical and critical movement during the first half of this century. This consideration has overshadowed and surpassed the other schools thanks to

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their theoretical ideas and practical criticism dominating in almost every university and college in the United States.

b. The Spanish scholars' tendency, similar to that of their European colleagues, to direct their efforts to the knowledge of inherently European theoretical trends: Russian Formalism, Stylistics, Structuralism, etc.<sup>3</sup> This tendency has prevented American literary ideas from taking root in European culture, with the exception of the great revolution that took place in the domain of philosophic and literary scholarship: Deconstruction, that, although born in Europe, has travelled to the U. S. A. where it has gained, from its presence in Yale's classrooms, the seal of fashionability. On the other hand, this opinion should not be understood as a gratuitous criticism of those who have paid attention to European literary theory. Just taking into account the great number of schools, tendencies, movements, and authors, one would realize that this effort has been necessary, essential, and, in certain cases insufficiently exhaustive. One more proof of this cultural lack of communication and exchange of ideas exchange is the same inattention, at times to the extent of idleness, which American critics adopted for many years towards European theories. In their favour they have the capacity of their culture to assimilate the continuous visits of internationally famous figures to their universities, and the speed to make their own that which started out as was only a loan.

c. Due to the Chicago School's strongly dominant university base, its wider diffusion has been rather limited. At no time have their ideas and methods travelled further afield than the University of Chicago (meeting point of the main group in the thirties) and the University of Toronto, both places where R. S. Crane, the undoubted leader of the group, taught over the course of his career. In contrast to the New Criticism, which quickly took over control of the English Departments of the most important universities in the country, the Chicago School did not consider undertaking a serious campaign of proselytism, which prevented it from getting not only the status of a majority movement but also national and international acknowledgment and implantation.

In spite of that, it is clear that there is a whole second and third-generation NeoAristotelian approach that, to a greater or lesser extent, owes its intellectual base and even its very ideas to the education given in the University of Chicago during the last fifty years. This at times theoretically unorthodox approach, which in spite of this owes a debt of gratitude to the standards set by Crane and McKeon above all, invites such famous names as W. C. Booth, N. Friedman and N. Frye, whose intellectual stature give an idea of the high standard of the first Neo-Aristotelians. Therefore there is still detailed research to be done about the influence of the Chicago School on literary scholarship in the United States in the second half of this century.

d. The last of the causes considered to have contributed to the neglect suffered by the Chicago critics in our country has been the difficulty in obtaining the original sources, which could be called the group's manifestos. There is an almost complete lack of translations, references are scarce and reviews almost non-existent. What is more, the first articles appeared in specialist reviews during the thirties, most of which never reached Spain, and when at last the compilation of the group's most representative work, *Critics and Criticism: Ancient and Modern*, was published, North American criticism was already advancing down rather different paths which, due to their contemporary and novel

character, were more successful in winning the attention of Spanish specialists. So one must conclude that even conditions that might be called external have never favoured the diffusion and acceptance of Neo-Aristotelian ideas. Taking into account that not only were they eclipsed by the development of the New Criticism but also that they were displaced by more innovative trends in scholarship, and locked up in an ivory tower in the University of Chicago, it is understandable why these critics' assumptions have had no easy way of reaching our country, which was more interested in finding out about theories which appeared at first to have greater influence and implantation.

In the face of this situation, the aim of this essay responds to the interest in recovering a period of American literary criticism and of a group of authors who (and this is no exaggeration of their achievements) constructed a whole theoretical project with solid foundations, based on tradition—Who can stray from the path marked out by Aristotle without slipping up?—but open to whatever own moment in history might offer.

This essay is only conceived as a basic review for the Spanish reader, a contribution to a basic bibliography, as the title indicates. It is not our aim to write a bibliography with commentary, so we shall avoid any assessment, opinions or commentaries about the named works. Instead, and whenever it has been possible to find them, we shall give specific details about every work when they may be of interest. For instance, the year of its publication, the city and the publisher in the case of books; the volume, number and pages numbers in the case of articles; the editions of the work, its different versions, its reprintings in compilations, collected works or books by the same author, etc. so that it is easier for the interested reader to find what he is looking for. All these details, together with their inclusion in a specific part of this essay, will provide a clear idea of the character of every included work, of its importance within an author's career and of any success it may have achieved since its first publication. This may cause some works to appear under different headings due either to the mixture of its theoretical and critical character, or to it first appearing as an article and later being included in a book by the same author or to its inclusion in a collected work. The appearance of some work twice has been preferable so as to provide an exhaustive study, at the risk of appearing repetitive. Not knowing whether one heading or another would be the best one for a specific work, we think that its duplication will favour those readers interested in a particular subject who, in otherwise, would have to look through all the works one by one to avoid missing any of them that could be under another heading because of the variety of its content.

The works collected under the heading "Primary sources" are those written by the authors commonly accepted as integral parts of the Chicago School, that is, the members of the first group who coincided in the thirties and forties in the Departments of English and Philosophy of the University of Chicago and whose most important articles appeared in the collected work edited in 1952 by R. S. Crane, *Critics and Criticism: Ancient and Modern*. Apart from the editor other contributors to this work were W. R. Keast, N. F. Maclean, R. P. McKeon, E. Olson and B. Weinberg.

To achieve a better understanding of the different authors' output, we have opted for under division in four different headings (1a, 1b, 1c, 1d); the first one contains for general assumptions on literary theory and criticism, and the other three, the traditionally accepted

generic distinctions: Fiction, Drama and Poetry, all of them considered as much in terms of their theoretical character as in terms of their practical and analytical aspects.

The second part, "Secondary sources," consists of three headings: "Studies on the Chicago School," "Success of the Chicago School in Spain," and "Other works of interest." The first heading (2e) assembles the works (books and articles) that interpret, evaluate, describe, comment or record the theoretical-critical activity of the school as a whole or of its individual members, including monographs and chapters from general studies or from articles about this subject published in the United States or other countries.

The heading "2f," "Success of the Chicago School in Spain," is made up of translations, in any of Spain's official languages, of the Neo-Aristotelian works, as well as of those reviews, articles or mere references that, in a direct although not always very extensive way, deal with the work developed by the members of the Chicago group.

The last heading, "Other works of interest," is a kind of miscellanea where there is a mixture of general studies on American contemporary criticism, handbooks, anthologies and translations from the primary sources into some other languages. As regards the studies on American contemporary criticism, rather than making an indiscriminate selection of studies, only those which are significative (albeit tangentially) for an understanding of the Chicago critics have been included, not only for what they say, but also for what they omit to say. This is therefore not an exhaustive review of the American contemporary criticism, but an approximation as close as possible to the reality that surrounded the coming-out of the Neo-Aristotelian writings. By including several articles and books in Italian, we hope to make the Spanish reader's search easier.

Under this heading, as in the previous ones, perhaps some titles considered essential may have been missed; taking this already into account, the door remains open for those blanks to be filled in, those mistakes corrected and every detail collected with the exhaustive dedication the subject undoubtedly deserves.

## 1. Primary sources

### 1a. General assumptions on literary theory and criticism: theoretical account and method

#### 1a1. Collected works: compilations

Crane, R. S. ed. *Critics and Criticism: Ancient and Modern*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1952. Rpt. Midway Reprints. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1975.

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#### 1a2. Specific works: books

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## 2. Secondary sources

### 2e. Studies on the Chicago School

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**Notes**

1. The most important approach to the Chicago School in Spain is D. Ynduráin, "La Escuela de Chicago," in *Introducción a la metodología literaria* (Madrid: S. G. E. L., 1979), pp. 66-69.
2. These reasons, as well as a deep approach to the Chicago School can be found in my Doctoral Dissertation entitled *Las ideas literarias de la Escuela neoaristotélica de Chicago*.
3. Two clear examples of this tendency would be A. García Berrio, *Significado actual del formalismo ruso* (Barcelona: Planeta, 1973) and M. Rodríguez Pequeño, *La teoría de los géneros literarios y los formalistas rusos* (Madrid: Júcar, 1991).