20TH CENTURY CRITICAL SCENARIO AND THE RISE OF THE CHICAGO SCHOOL OF CRITICISM

I

If the advent of modernism is something more than a mere historical event it must be admitted that literary criticism in the United States achieved modernity not before the second decade of the twentieth century. I say this, firstly, because of the fact, as Glicksberg has pointed out, that "before 1910 there was little criticism of American literature." America was still engaged, in the early years of the 20th century, in the preceding century's search for a sense of national identity. The country lacked remarkably the creative confidence and courage to establish a respectable ideal especially in the field of literary criticism. And secondly because the early 20th century America followed, to a great extent, the romantic and victorian ideas and ideals so far as literary art and criticism were concerned.

In those years, Rene Wellek observes, "the United States was still ruled by what, in 1911, Santayana labeled the 'Genteel Tradition', a variant of Victorianism, of vapid, derivative idealism". The first remarkable voice against this vapid idealism was, of course, that of H.L. Mencken, whose relatively small amount of writing on literary criticism had a great impact on the ensuing change of a general taste and outlook during and after the first world war.

However, literary criticism in America had its rapid development from the second decade of the 20th century, and within a very short time it achieved a remarkable place beside the contemporary European criticism and culture. Before the most remarkable critical movement of the century, I mean the New Criticism, there were in the field of American literary criticism at least three major trends under the names of Impressionism, New Humanism and Marxist Criticism, each one of which has left a distinguished mark in the history of literary criticism.

My intention, however, is not to give a historical account of the various critical movements. Nor do I intend to find out the respective values of these movements. My intention is rather to study the reasons why so many critical theories come to exist as well as to point out the fault

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which is common to all of them. My final aim is to show that the critical theory of the Chicago school of critics may be taken as the best possible solution to the problem existing in all the preceding theories, and that this theory may offer us a relatively fruitful way of critical analysis and appreciation of literary texts, removing the unhealthy war of-isms and critical schools.

It should be borne in mind that the birth of a new theory or idea in literary criticism is never whimsical or out of the track. Generally, the limitations of the past ideas on the one hand and the literary position - the demand of the literary works of a certain period - on the other are two of the major stimuli behind the birth of a new critical theory, whatever it may be. Not only that, a new theory may also be the function of some new knowledge, which modifies our experience of life and literature. As our knowledge about life and society broadens, the existing outlooks and attitudes undergo magnificent changes. It is then that a new theory often emerges to meet the needs of the changed situations, caused by the new revelations in the field of knowledge. Psycho-analytical criticism, for example, developed into a system when the psycho-analytical theories of Freud and Jung made the critics aware of the role of the subconscious in any creative endeavour. The literary artists

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also consciously exploited their newly acquired knowledge of psychology in their works. The sub-conscious is thus artistically exploited in literary works as a result of which the existing critical theories became, to some extent at least, inadequate for proper evaluation of this new element, and this inadequacy of the previous theories led to the growth of psycho-analytical criticism.

These are, therefore, some of the points which explain the reasons of the existence of different critical theories in the realm of literary criticism. They also make it clear that we can hardly deny the necessity of a new method to judge and evaluate the newer elements in literature better. In fact, each and every critical theory highlights or takes into its special consideration some aspects which were either overlooked, or neglected, or not anticipated in the past theories. Each theory has thus its specific value.

But the problem arises when any particular critical school claims to have the only and possibly the best method, in supersession of all the previous ones considered as incomplete and inadequate. They fall a victim to their monistic approaches and dogmatic stands. No critical theory before that of the Chicago school of critics - Impressionism, New Humanism, Marxist Criticism or the New Criticism - is free from this fault. Each of them neglects certain aspects
in its over-enthusiasm of giving special attention to and emphasis on some others, and at the same time tries to establish itself as the only valid method of criticism. They fail to realize what Harry Levin said in 1957. "Literature", he said, "appeals to so many values, aesthetic and otherwise, that it requires a pluralistic approach".

The New Humanists of the 20th century, for example, like most of the 19th century European and American critics were so much pre-occupied with the extra-textual factors like the question of morality that they could pay only a little attention to the aesthetic elements in a literary work. An extreme pre-occupation with the ethical elements in literature restricted their critical evaluation; and in consequence they failed to create a positive line of criticism. Paul Elmer More, for example, fostered the view that before evaluating a piece of literary work he must be convinced that the work in question is ethically right. Such a pre-occupation easily makes the critic prejudiced in regard to many other elements in a work, and precludes the possibility of an objective judgement.


5 See Glicksberg, C.I. op. cit. Introduction, p.40 "He (Paul Elmer More) was scholarly and high-minded, conscientious, thorough, and eloquent, but his moral prepossessions held his sensibility in check and seriously inhibited his native powers of aesthetic judgment. Before he could accept and approve of a work it had to satisfy his conception of what was ethically right, and if it lacked this saving element, whatever other virtues it might possess, he felt justified in rejecting it".
The question of objectivity is equally suspected in case of the Impressionists also. They were tempted to explain a literary work on the basis of the effects it had on them. The text to the impressionistic critic was some sort of a stimulus that created various responses in the minds of man. This process of stimulus and response, however, is purely subjective, because the responses were likely to vary from critic to critic. Naturally it tended to become more creative than critical. Mencken in 1919 expressed his view that the critic "makes the work of art live for the spectator; he makes the spectator live for the work of art". His suggestion is that a critic should try to be creative. In fact, we find that the text to an impressionist is the starting point as well as the point of departure because the text just triggers off the critic's imagination and he gives us his impressions without assigning any scientific or objective reasons for having those impressions. He does not care to locate in the text the rational sources of his impressions. Thus there remains a great possibility of exaggeration and personal enthusiasm in it and the intellectual sides of criticism - the examination of the interior structure and principles of organization in a literary work, and the evaluation of the artistic process - are more or less neglected.

Marxist criticism, immediately after its appearance received enormous attention of the critics and was widely cultured during the thirties. Its earlier stand of course did not remain unchanged. In the hands of the later critics like Jameson, Althuser and Eagleton it has been widely modified; its scope has broadened to accommodate new approaches. However, in general, we may say that "Marxism has shown two faces: a historical method which is analytic, and a doctrinal position which is dogmatic". The Marxist critics, out of their extreme partiality to the theory of socio-economic-political goal of writing, popularized the view that the social, economic and political values of a literary work must be established first because the artist as an individual is restricted and influenced by those factors of his contemporary life. The real cause of the artistic creation, according to the Marxist critics, can be found in the socio-economic-political factors of that period. Thus the mistake they make is to reduce the scope of criticism and to keep aside the aesthetic criterion of judging a literary work as a literary work and not as a social document. They fail to realize that the creative mind, though not free from the socio-political influences of its immediate environment, is never engaged in a direct presentation of those factors. If it happened to be so, then journalism could also be literature because it represents the socio-political situations of a period; and the age-old works of literature could no longer please us.

7 Levin, Harry, "Criticism in Crisis", Contexts of Criticism, op.cit., p.258.
because the socio-economic situations in which they were written, do not exist today. What all these different groups of literary critics actually fail to notice out of an extreme fascination for their own theories is that poetic or aesthetic practice includes more than one principle, object and idea. Therefore, any method which aims at a single aspect, as most of the available theories do, is sure to be inadequate and incomplete, though not necessarily wrong.

II

The New Criticism, which has of course a remarkably great contribution to literary criticism, ultimately falls a victim to the monistic shortcomings. The origin of this critical movement can be traced back to its reaction to Impressionism, Marxist Criticism, New Humanism and such other critical theories, which were chiefly extra-textual criticism in the sense that their primary interest was on the elements other than the aesthetic ones. The observation of William Phillips may be cited here. Phillips observes: "The New Criticism was, of course, largely a creation against earlier impressionist and biographical approaches, and one-dimensional social and historical interpretations of literature, particularly the Marxist variety. It was an attempt to free literature from being a branch of civics or morality or
In fact, critics did not pay sufficient attention to the texts. And it is primarily as a reaction to this neglect of the texts that the New Critics make the texts the object of first importance in any type of critical evaluation. Eliot may be considered to be the pioneer of this new temperament because he, in 1919, tried "to divert interest from the poet to the poetry" by recommending that "honest criticism and sensitive appreciation is directed not upon the poet but upon the poetry". In fact, as Dr Ray observes, "Eliot and Richards provided the perspective for reorienting literary criticism toward a new object, new methodological form and new epistemological structure."

The New Criticism has resurrected the text by advocating close reading free from preconceptions and theoretical speculations. One may ask whether it is possible for a

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11 Ibid., p.53.

critic to approach a work of art with a mind, like a clean slate, free from all preconceptions. But that is a different question. Our point is that the greatest contribution of the New Critics is to emphasize the importance of the text. However, the New Critics unfortunately do not stop there and go to the extreme. They consider the literary text to be an autonomous, self-contained and organic object, having no extra-textual loyalty. Thus a good many aspects—biographical, historical, sociological and the like—are simply kept aside, drastically reducing the scope of criticism in process. They are concerned chiefly with those aspects which were either neglected or not taken into consideration by the preceding theories of literary criticism. The New Criticism builds its magnificent critical super-structure on the basis of an intensified attention on the previously neglected aesthetic qualities of the literary art. But this new theory also, due to the enthusiastic zeal of its practitioners to make criticism exclusively text-based, neglects the extra-textual aspects, which are not less important to evaluate a work like Shakespeare's Henry IV or Dickens' A Tale of Two Cities—a work that exploits the social or political history of a land.

The New Critics are chiefly recognized as critics of poetry. But even in that field their theory is incomplete. Cleanth Brooks, for example, concentrates his attention on the pervasive function of paradox. He declares it to be at
the centre of all poems. He is of course sensible in his arguments regarding the critical analysis of a poem. He rightly thinks that a poem is a united whole and that the paraphrasing method of analysis leaves hidden the unparaphrasable elements in a poem. But his implication that a simple set of criterion — that is the criterion of paradox — is sufficient to judge all types of poetry is hardly acceptable. There are poems — the 19th century romantic poems of Wordsworth and others, for example — which cannot be satisfactorily judged by this single criterion. That is why R.S. Crane reacted so forcefully in his review of Brooks' *The Well Wrought Urn*[^13]. And even Ransom, who was one of the great New Critics, criticizes Brooks' view that poetry is the language of paradox. Simple, sensuous, and passionate poems are actually there which do not depend on paradox for their poetic appeal. Most of the Elizabethan lyrics may exemplify this. Ransom feels that paradox as a principle of poetry is a very weak basis and he prescribes instead a closer attention to structure, giving the superior place to the poetry of things and the inferior to the poetry of ideas[^14]. But Ransom here does the same prescriptive fallacy of monistic approach by denouncing the 'paradox' theory of


Brooks and prescribing his own method. He fails to realize that the theory of paradox must be helpful in some cases, and therefore it cannot be rejected as totally wrong or useless. He also remains blind to the limitations of his distinction between the poetry of things and the poetry of ideas. For every poem must necessarily contain idea, at least from the poets' point of view. And the 'poetry of idea' if any poem can be called thus, is never idea alone; objects in some form or other must remain to give a body to the idea. In other words, Ransom fails to understand that the concrete and the abstract in poetry are not mutually exclusive.

Again, Ransom calls the New Criticism as specifically literary criticism, and he maintains that the "business of the literary critic is exclusively with an aesthetic criticism". This view of Ransom is obviously a protest against the Marxist negligence of the aesthetic values. But here he commits the same mistake, like the Marxist critics, of reducing the scope of criticism. A critic is surely not a moralist, or a historian or a sociologist, but why should a critic be disallowed the consideration of the social, historical or other aspects of a literary work? This tendency


leads to the contention that the New Critics' view of art was limited as John Fekete has pointed out. He writes, "... art must be seen as a moment of the historical practice of the social formation, intimately involved, within the categories of the totalization of praxis, with the essentials of human development at a concrete moment in space and time; and Ransom and the New Critics failed to locate art in these terms." The New Critics only emphasized an empiricist close reading of the text but failed to see that it can hardly attain success without, in the language of Frye, "a sense of the archetypal shape of literature as a whole." In their judgment of a work of art, the New Critics lose the help of the analogies of different literary genres. They approach the various genres like poetry, drama and novel with the same set of criterion, ignoring the fact that every individual branch of literature as a unique mode of discourse possesses certain peculiarities of its own. Such a monistic approach is bound to be partial, and therefore incomplete.

Some of the theoretical defects of the New Critics - their deficiency in the selection of first principles of critical investigation as well as their deviation from proper inquiry, for example - have been beautifully analysed by

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R.S. Crane in his essay "Criticism as Inquiry: Or, The Perils of the 'High Priori Road'". Crane here observes that the advocates of the New Criticism, out of their zeal of acquiring for criticism a respectable position by including it in the curriculum of studies, opposed the older order of scholarship by setting criticism in rather sharp antithesis to it. In consequence two different groups emerge - the historical scholars and the critics - with some sort of a tension between the two. In the trial period of criticism during the thirties, when it was struggling to achieve a popular and respectable place, it was perhaps more or less justified to set criticism in an antithetical balance to historical scholarship. One can understand and possibly appreciate the activities of the critics then to minimize the importance of the problems with which the historical scholars mainly concern themselves and to maximize the values of critical study.

Here it may be passingly observed what Crane considers to be the distinctive functions of the two groups. The historical scholars, according to Crane, are concerned mainly with problems related to "the material contents and the historical circumstances of literary works than on their distinctive character as works of art".19 The critics, on

the contrary, concern themselves chiefly with the distinctive features of a work of art - what it is that the author has created. Crane, however, believes that the one group may and should take help of the other in order to make itself more fruitful and comprehensive. But he observes a growing indifference on the part of the New Critics in bridging the gap between criticism and historical-philological scholarship. Crane's point is that when criticism overcomes its crisis and establishes itself as a popular branch of studying literary art, one should try to remove the misconception regarding the relationship between critical investigation and historical scholarship. For, actually there is hardly any contradiction between them; they are, in fact, complementary to each other. It is, therefore, not proper to subvert the older order of teaching and research; it is harmful even to criticism. The critics of the thirties - most of them - failed to realize this truth. They were blind to the fact that as the historical mode of study remains incomplete without critical analysis and judgment, similarly "there can be no adequate criticism that is not solidly based on the history of the art with which it is concerned".  

After pointing out this basic fault of the New Critics Crane exhibits the limitations of their critical practice. The New Critics, Crane observes, are faulty in their

20 Ibid., p.27.
method of critical investigation as well as in the use of hypotheses. A popular practice of a New Critic, he finds, is "to reduce to a single formula the overwhelming variety of aims, subjects, moods, views of life, forms, methods, uses of language he has encountered in past and present writings which have gone under the names of 'literature' or 'poetry'." 21 It is thus that we find propositions like 'the language of poetry is the language of paradox' or 'literature is ultimately metaphorical and symbolic'. As first principles these critics suddenly take up such propositions which apparently have a universal or semi-universal scope of application, and then come down to explain the literary texts in the light of those principles. Another way of establishing first principles is more or less a method of dialectical analysis. In this method the New Critics begin by laying down some general postulate like that poetry is the polar opposite of science, and then proceed to work out logically the implications of that postulate. This method is more or less the same as the old method of bipartite division.

However, the New Critics' method of explaining the inner properties of a piece of literary work, poetry for example, is, according to Crane, inappropriate for two major reasons. First, Literature is not something natural but human creation - art. And like any other art dealing with man and the world an interaction between man and the word is

21 Ibid., p.32.
infinitely complex because each word in spite of some generic homogeneity is also a unique mode of discourse. No common criterion - however refined - can be adequate to cover the universe of discourse contained within a literary work. In other words, the New Critics suffer from the fallacy of hasty generalization in regard to literary works. There is nothing predeterminate in literature. "To attempt, therefore, to derive its nature a priori from general postulates, to geometrize about it - for that is what these theorists in effect have been doing - is wholly to miss the point" 22.

Secondly, the method of dialectical analysis through contrasts, which these critics employ, can never determine the actually operative principles of construction, meanings or values of literary works. If, for example, we do a contrastive study of a poem and a scientific treatise, the point we miss is that the two are different types of production and, therefore, require two different modes to analyse and judge their inner characters.

Crane also shows that the practice of the New Critics is incompatible with the mode of true inquiry because in it the result is more or less predetermined. They simply find in literary work what they want to find, and remain completely blind to those other important aspects which do not come under their principle. Theorizing of this kind

22 Ibid., p.36.
actually reduces inquiry into a "mere application of pre-established dogmas". The result is predetermined by the dogmas and the critic cannot discover anything beyond what is already known. The problem arises out of the fact that the New Critics, insulated from history ignored the most vital fact that a literary work does not exist in vacuum. It is produced at a particular point of time in history and is, therefore, governed by all the historical forces operating at that particular point of time. To ignore this fact is to decontextualize a literary work, which is bound to result in a criticism that loses touch with reality.

The term that Crane uses to signify this faulty approach of the New Critics is 'dialectical fallacy'. He shows that it is often possible to discover a meaning of a literary work as one desires and thus one can show the applicability of his own theory. But what one fails to see here is that any other critic may in the same way fit his own theory to the same work. This exactly is what happens to the New Critics. Almost everyone of them takes it for granted that his hypothesis is quite in tune with the work he judges, and, therefore, feels no urge to justify the applicability of his favourite hypothesis against other possible ones. He hardly feels the necessity to support his findings with sufficient documentary evidences.

23 Ibid., p.37.
In this way Crane shows how the New Critics fail to offer us an organized form of criticism, though they may claim credit enough to popularize criticism and to give it a proper place in the academic world. Crane's observation is of signal importance because it registers strong reasoned protest against the basic assumptions of New Criticism in its hey day.

Actually critical monism, the tendency that prevails in most of the critical theories including the New Criticism, is a less effective and less fruitful pursuit because it takes under its consideration only one or two aspects of literature. It never allows a critic to look beyond its limited premises, even when the text may have other aspects to be considered. And this characteristic defect of critical monism is one of the major reasons why a change in critical approach becomes gradually imminent towards the second half of 1940s. A. Walton Litz has carefully marked this change and thus remarked that "the general trend of literary criticism since 1945 has been from concensus to diversity, from the dominance of formalistic criticism to a bewildering variety of criticisms which seek to move 'beyond' or 'against' formalism."²⁴ This changing attitude was clear in

the rise and writings of the Chicago group of critics headed by R.S. Crane, upon whom the designation of 'pluralistic critic' has been given although, it must be noted, he never used or accepted the term 'pluralism' in its present mistaken sense of a theory of 'live and let live'.

III

During the thirties and early forties of this century the major "controversy among literary theorists centered chiefly on the 'true' nature of poetry and the 'proper' character of criticism". I do not want to generalize or over simplify the complex critical scene of the thirties and early forties. But truly speaking that was, in brief, what the critics of this transitional period had been trying to achieve. The traditions of impressionistic and moralistic criticisms were already estimated to be incomplete and unsatisfactory. The primary enthusiasm of Marxist Criticism was also at a low ebb. The new trend in criticism initiated by Eliot and Richards reached its height in the New Criticism. But it has also failed to offer us a method of comprehensive criticism of literary art. Different critics of this group, as has already been seen, tend to give us different views of poetry and poetic criticism.

In such a situation the writings of the Chicago group received some attention. Their primary aim was to rectify the deficiencies of all the previous critical theories and to offer a scientific and fruitful method for critical analysis. They do not discard any theory as wrong. They examine the limitations of the past theories - their tendencies of dogmatism and reductionism - and emphasize the necessity of formulating a really fruitful method of critical judgment on the basis of a knowledge of the defects of the preceding theories. Eliseo Vivas, in his review of *Critics and Criticism*, has rightly observed that "Crane and his friends have always put main emphasis on the principles and methods of criticism."26.

The Chicago critics believe, and quite correctly, that the ends or results of one's analysis of a literary work may and do vary as and when the principles applied to the process of analysis are different. This is a part of what H.L. McKeon in his article, "The Philosophical Bases of Art and Criticism", suggests. McKeon observes that the doctrinal differences are largely due to the differences in principles and their philosophical foundations. Thus, the apparent disagreements among critics are not always real disagreements. They are often results of the potentialities of the critical terms, used in a multiplicity of senses, and also of the

philosophical assumptions which determine the different principles of critical analysis.

Crane also supports McKeon's view when he say that "literary criticism is not and never has been a single discipline, to which successive writers have made partial and never wholly satisfactory contributions, but rather a collection of distinct and more or less incommensurable 'frameworks' or 'languages', within any one of which a question like that of poetic structure necessarily takes on a different meaning and receives a different kind of answer from the meaning it has and the kind of answer it is properly given in any of the rival critical languages in which it is discussed". To illustrate his point Crane mentions the critical war between Bradley and L.C. Knights. It is no war at all. The same subject matter may be approached differently, leading to two different results. Two critics, working with the same subject, namely 'tragedy' or Macbeth or Shakespearean tragedy for example, may focus the readers' attention on two different aspects by the semantic and logical constitutions of their discourse. It proves that there are many critical subject-matters hidden under the various familiar names for literary entities. All these subjects have their basis in a mysteriously abstract thing like human mind; their characters are always changing and relative, quite different from the invariant natural phenomena.

In his "Questions and Answers in the Teaching of Literary Texts" also Crane exhibits how doctrinal conclusions may and do vary as the contexts in which the critics consider certain problems about the literary texts differ. Crane clearly says that "all statements in criticism have logical contexts, apart from which nothing significant can be said about them; and the immediate context of any statement is the precise question (often not explicitly formulated at all) to which it is an intended answer."\(^{28}\) So the statements (or answers) in critical observation must differ widely from critic to critic as the contexts (which are questions) differ. What follows then is that we cannot allow a comparative study of doctrinal conclusions of any two critics, and cannot discard one as wrong until we are satisfied that they are answers to the same questions. Crane also observes that contexts are likely to be different in different critics because they are relative to the "larger context of primary terms, distinctions, and premises which make up the conceptual 'framework' of the critics' writing, and determine both what questions he will think it possible or important to ask and what kinds of answers he will seek for them."\(^{29}\) When all these will be taken into consideration, it must be found that "what appears to


\(^{29}\) Ibid., p.179.
be hopeless doctrinal conflicts in criticism are not really doctrinal conflicts at all, but simply expressions of preference among different, but equally defensible, frameworks, within any two of which the seemingly common referents of the critics' statements may only nominally be the same.\(^{30}\)

Elder Olson's assumption is also basically the same. The number of critical positions, he thinks, is not one but many. Criticism is a branch of philosophy and, therefore, the number of possible philosophical positions determine the number of possible critical positions. Olson, along with the other Chicagoans, shares the view, as Pritchard points out, that "Criticisms differ according as they center upon one or another facet of art: its medium, its productive cause, its end, or as they focus upon several of these facets at once."\(^{31}\) Naturally, a particular theory that takes up only one or two of these various facets is incomplete but not conflicting with another theory that considers some others. We should, therefore, Olson concludes, try to achieve a critical method that will allow us to consider all the important aspects of a literary work. It is out of this belief that Olson, at the beginning of his essay "An Outline of Poetic Theory," criticizes and rejects dogmatism, syncretism and skepticism because neither a dogmatist, nor a syncretist,

\[^{30}\text{Ibid., p.179.}\]

\[^{31}\text{Pritchard, J.P., }\text{Criticism in America, op. cit., p.281.}\]
nor even a skeptic realizes that the differences in critical principles and observations are not always real differences. "All these views", Olson observes, "are potentially harmful to learning in so far as, in suppressing discussion, they suppress some (and in the case of skepticism, all) of the problems and because, consequently, they retard or even arrest progress within the subject."

The Chicagoans, thus, were well aware of two major aspects in framing their critical theory - one is the limitations or the incomplete nature of monistic criticism, and the other is the multiplicity of critical approaches. And this awareness, in fact, led them to hail critical pluralism. But I must hasten to add that the Chicagoans never accepted the term 'pluralism' in its oftenly mistaken sense of a theory of forceful yaking of all the available dogmas. They knew very well that a literary piece may not be fit for all the theories available so far. Naturally, any approach to a literary work with a host of critical dogmas may create only an insensible jumble but no clear critical opinion. It is on this point that Crane specially emphasizes. He, of course, does not exclude dogma from the scope of literary criticism. He rather admits the necessity of some sort of dogma, or 'a set of first principles' in his own words, to

start with. But his point is that these 'principles' are to be used not to exclude any of the already existing opinions, but to solve some particular critical problems amenable to solution. The critic is free to use any principle which may seem useful to solve his problems. Thus, what the Chicagoans mean to suggest by critical pluralism is simply that a critic must not work to show the applicability or correctness of his own method; he will rather work to judge and evaluate the literary piece properly, and in this task he may take the help of as many principles as he thinks useful. It will help the critic to evaluate any type of work, changing his principles as the texts will require, and to show the various aspects of a literary work successfully.

Such a concept of criticism, we must note, is not in war with any of the existing critical theories, including the New Criticism. It may really help "an enlargement rather than a further restriction of the sources of criticism". That is why A. Walton Litz remarks: "The ideas of Crane and his group may be viewed as complementary to those of such critics as Empson, Brooks, and Blackmur. In contrast to the 'monism' of many of his contemporaries, Crane saw himself as a 'pluralist', trying to recognize the virtues of different critical and scholarly methods and their appropriateness to

33 Crane, R.S., Preface to Critics and Criticism, op. cit., p.VII.
the literary problem at hand". It may also be recalled in this context that what Frederick A. Pottle says in *The Idiom of Poetry* about the philosophy of critical relativism is undoubtedly a support of the pluralistic view of criticism. Pottle observes that standards are variable and that the judgments a critic passes are always relative to the age in which they are made. Tastes change sharply and there is no reason for "concluding that taste grows progressively better, or that the mere passage of time widens literary sympathies and sharpens the critical faculty". What follows from Pottle's observation is that each critic is right (though he may be limited) in so far as he applies his standards of judgment consistently. But he must be wrong if he insists that his methods and, consequently, his judgments are absolute and infallible - true for all time. He is actually required, as and when necessary, to change the means and principles for dealing with different critical problems.

The pluralistic ideal of the Chicagoans, however, should not create the mistaken impression in anybody that this group of critics has no distinctive method of criticism, and that they only impart on us the knowledge of the

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34 Litz, A. Walton, "Literary Criticism", *op.cit.*., p.59.

applicability of different critical theories to different critical problems. Pritchard commits this mistake when he says that "the study of criticism as they [the Chicago Critics] envisage it is not designed to develop any new or peculiar critical method, but to examine and evaluate those approaches to literature which have been or currently are being used for its interpretation and judgment. Their work includes therefore the criticism of criticism." The mistake Pritchard commits here is simply that he misunderstands pluralism as a way of trying various critical theories to a literary work. The Chicagoans, as has already been seen, never use the term in that sense. They have followed a particular method of critical analysis which, they think, will be free from the limitations of a monistic approach and will, at the same time, enable us to have a harmonious and comprehensive criticism of literary works.

The critical method which the Chicagoans offer us may be in a very general way called a formal or structural approach to literature. They believe that a literary work "like any other production of human art, has, or rather is, a definite structure of some kind which is determined immediately by its writer's intuition of a form to be achieved in its materials by the right use of his medium." The critic's


37 Crane, R.S., The Languages of Criticism and the Structure of Poetry, op.cit., p.165.
task will be to realize the particular form of a literary work, and on the basis of his understanding he will select some specific principles of analysis. The principles thus may and do vary from work to work. And it is in this point that the Chicagoans differ from the New Critics even when they, like the New Critics, concentrate upon a poem as a poem primarily, and judge a poem upon its intrinsic merits. They never believe that a single criterion or principle is adequate to judge works of all the varieties. Pritchard rightly says that "far from proclaiming a new critical panacea the Chicago critics urge the application to literature of varied critical procedures". They, unlike the New Critics, consider the critical principles not as doctrinal absolutes but as instruments of analysis.

To a Chicago critic a poem or a literary work is a distinctive whole, which has its own unique function in human experience. And criticism, to them, is a reasoned discourse. Both the concepts make the Chicagoans Aristotelian in some respect. Actually Aristotle is there "behind what they [the Chicago critics] have sought to do in many of their essays in poetic theory and practical criticism". But this by no way means that they are dogmatic supporters of Aristotle and his approach. Crane has clearly said that

38 Pritchard, J.P., Criticism in America, op.cit., pp.281-82.
39 Crane, R.S., Preface to Critics and Criticism, op.cit., p.IV.
"they have been greatly interested, all along, in the particular class of critical problems which Aristotle was the first, possibly the last, to discuss systematically, and for the study of which he evolved an appropriate and workable method." And, therefore, they tried to "pursue similar lines of study in the poetics of modern literature." They have thus enlarged and modified the Aristotelian approach through additions and alterations in the light of the literary needs of the century. They are thus 'neo-Aristotelian' in a very restricted sense, because they never support Aristotle blindly. Crane's "our loyalty at any rate should be to problems rather than to ancient masters" sounds like a warning to themselves and to the succeeding generations of critics. In other words, Crane warns us against a dogmatic following of Aristotle. At the same time he suggests that we should not hesitate to take help of his insights if we find that they may enable us to solve the problems we face in an analysis and understanding of literary texts. It will almost be the same as our contemporary critics benefit from the observations of Freud, Jung, Frazer and such others. The Chicagoans, it is remarkable, oppose some earlier Aristotelians who sought to extend Aristotle's observations on tragedy to other literary genres. The Chicagoans stand aloof from this

40 Ibid., p.iii.
41 Ibid., p.iii.
42 Crane, R.S. The Languages of Criticism and the Structure of Poetry, op.cit., p.149.
group due to their belief, in a purely Aristotelian strain, 
that "each literary genre has its own principles of construc-
tion, and poems achieve wholeness by conforming to the prin-
ciples of their genres" ⁴³.

It will not be irrelevant now to point out some of 
the concepts in which the Chicagoans differ from the New Cri-
tics. It has already been observed that the Chicago critics 
support the New Critics' concentration on literary texts, 
their consideration of a literary work as primarily a work 
of art as well as their emphasis on the formal aspects of 
poetry or literature. But the Chicagoans do not support the 
New Critics' view about the ends of poetry. The ends of poe-
try to the New Critics are a superior kind of knowledge. And 
in support of their theory the New Critics often cite those 
lines from the Poetics where Aristotle, while speaking about 
history and poetry, declares that "one (history) describes 
the thing that has been, and the other (poetry) a kind of 
thing that might be. Hence poetry is something more philo-
sophic and of graver import than history, since its state-
ments are of the nature rather of universals, whereas those 
of history are singulars" ⁴⁴. The Chicago critics, on the 
contrary believe that 'pleasure', not 'knowledge' is the end 
for which a literary work primarily exists. The construc-

⁴⁴ Aristotle, On the Art of Poetry, Trans. Ingram Bywater 
(Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1985), p.43.
of a work with a specific form, having organic unity of its parts produces the pleasure specific to its form. This difference between the Chicago and the New Critics in regard to the 'end' of poetry signifies the necessary difference between their respective attitudes to a literary work. Knowledge as an end of poetry requires an evaluative judgment of the nature and value of poetry or any other form of literary works, whereas the other concept - the concept of pleasure as the end - refers to the basic structural principle in every composition.

The New Critics adopted a method of verbal analysis based on the formal and linguistic aspects of a work of art. The Chicagoans think that it makes the New Critics psychologistic in their approach. The same set of words may convey meanings and suggestions of different kinds. Naturally, then, a verbal analysis can hardly lead to the same judgment regarding a literary work. Different critics arrive at different critical judgments of the same work. The Chicago critics, therefore, follow the method of structural analysis on the basis of the formal principles of the literary artists. This, they think, will maintain a uniformity of critical observations.

Differences between the two groups are also there in regard to their ideas about certain Aristotelian terms like 'plot', 'catharsis' etc. The Chicago critics use the word
'plot' not to mean, as it is often used to mean at present, the story element of a work. In their concept it is a framework or a means to an end. The elements of character, thought, action etc., out of which the artist effects a temporal synthesis are only the contents of a plot but not the plot proper. Plot is something for the Chicagoans which fashions the material objects of a work (character, action, thought, diction etc.) into a definite artistic object. And the excellence of a plot "depends upon the power of its peculiar synthesis of character, action and thought, as inferable from the sequence of words, to move our feelings powerfully and pleasurably in a certain definite way. To the Chicagoans, therefore, plot is of great importance - almost the soul of a work.

But the New Critics believe in the pre-eminence of language or words rather than that of plot. In their view the words are all important because they are the limit of what the poet has to say. To the Chicagoans, however, it is not the words actually, but what they stand for, that is important. And they think that the New Critics' dogmatic adherence to language is a severe limitation of their method.

Before I pass on to an observation of the theoretical appliances of R.S. Crane in the following chapter, it is

45 Crane, R.S., "The Concept of Plot and the Plot of Tom Jones", Critics and Criticism, op.cit., p.68.
necessary, I think, to consider one more point - the point of Rene Wellek's criticism of the Chicagoans' 'ideals of complete objectivity'. Rene Wellek, I think, has not properly followed the theoretical stand of the Chicago school of critics when he says that "the Chicago group are learned historian of criticism with the impractical ideals of complete objectivity and completeness of evidence". Ray also made a similar point as early as in 1984 in the 16th Triennial Congress of the International Federation of Modern Languages and Literatures, held in Budapest, 1984, when he remarked "... since man is a man, and not a machine, he can never attain scientific objectivity in relation to a work of art, as his judgment on it has to depend on his reaction to it. Moreover, the personality of one critic will always differ from that of another critic by virtue of his experiences, knowledge and beliefs". The Chicagoans no doubt valued objectivity in criticism, and there can be no dispute in the fact that any responsible criticism requires objective analysis of a literary work. But since the mind is involved in the act of analysis and evaluation, and since the

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46 Wellek, Rene', A History of Modern Criticism, op.cit., p.66.

critic is not a machine but man, absolute objectivity can never be attainable perhaps in practice. The Chicagoans, in fact, never aspire for such an unattainable mechanical objectivity. Crane, for example, has elaborated his idea of objectivity in criticism in many of his essays. He has repeatedly suggested that a critic should try to be as objective as possible. The method of hypothesis making, which Crane illustrates in his essay "On Hypothesis in Historical Criticism", may be cited as an example of how he tries to make a critic more objective and unbiased in his judgment. This is never a sign of the "impractical ideals of complete objectivity" as Wellek complains.

The same thing can be said about what Wellek calls the Chicagoans' desire for a 'completeness of evidence'. The Chicago critics, in order that rash, subjective judgments may be avoided, have emphasized that a critic's observation about a literary work must conform to all the internal and external aspects of that work. If any aspect of the text disagrees with the critic's findings, one may suspect the validity of them. Such an attitude of the Chicagoans, if seen in proper perspective and spirit appears to be quite reasonable and it goes a long way in forming a tradition of responsible criticism. Such an ideal will make a critic more careful in the selection of his hypothesis as well as in passing his final comments on a literary work.
The Chicago school of critics, thus, appear at a time when literary criticism through a long tradition of monistic approach became extremely limited. They surely broaden the scope of criticism by pointing out the limitations of monism, and also by showing the way toward a more liberal, more comprehensive form of criticism in which the unhealthy rivalry of -isms does not exist.