

Radojka Vukčević*

University of Belgrade
Faculty of Philology
English Department
Belgrade, Serbia

THE ROADS OF AMERICAN LITERARY CRITICISM TAKEN

Abstract

The paper will discuss the history of American literary critical approaches from 1800 until the beginning of the twentieth century. The focus will be on critical idealism, critical realism, aestheticism, the New Criticism, feminism, deconstruction, archetypal criticism, humanism, Afro-American criticism, the black aesthetic, deconstructionism, ecological criticism, and cultural criticism. The *academicization* of criticism since 1940, its causes, consequences, and controversies will also be in the focus of research. It will provide a historical bridge between the previous and modern debates on modern literary, language, and cultural theory. This means that influential ideas, critical paradigms, and disciplinary debates will be the road taken in this research.

Key words: literary criticism, theory, New Criticism, fragmentation, post-theory.

The paths of American literary theory resembled the paths of American literature. The American critic shared the heritage of European civilization with their British or French colleague, but was at the same time aware of their own national legacy which differed from the European. The first trails of American literary criticism can be traced back to as early as 1815 when the journals *North American Review*, *Democratic Review* and *Whig Review* (1845) were founded in order to cherish tendencies towards Romanticism

* E-mail address: vukcevicradojka@gmail.com

and nationalism. Well-educated editors of the *North American Review* were the first ones to grasp the need for American literary criticism. It was not an easy task to find the way as most of the critics generally praised anything published by American authors. This is why Edgar Allan Poe defended universal values and judged nationalism as a criterion for literary values: art is international, and works of art must be judged regardless of where and when they were created; the role of a critic is to make an assessment based on both personal and national criteria and nothing should influence their critical judgment. Poe goes a step further and anticipates future American literary criticism by insisting that a critic must judge a literary work as something contained within the work itself, and not only as an instrument of ideas, emotions and events: originality is made by intentional techniques and need not reflect the author's character or the environment in which they write (Stovall 1964: 3-10).

The American Civil War (1861-65) brought political unity, but also cultural disintegration. Literary criticism separated down two paths: one which would favour the perpetuation of European tradition (Longfellow, Lowell), and the other which would slowly pave the way for American literary criticism (Emerson, Whitman, Poe, Hawthorne and Melville). Soon, Howells would expand this path with his realist theory and Henry James would make sure that it recognized and preserved the moral idealism of Emerson and Hawthorne's age. On the other hand, in 19th century America there was a conflict between liberalism and authority, which were only different phases of one, organic structure. This organic evolution theory, even though it originated from European sources, was evidently very pleasing to the American mind (Stovall 1964: 10-11).

At the beginning of the 20th century, "criticism" split into two directions: it became a subject of interest for various groups searching for a way to overcome the gap between so-called "investigators" and "generalists". The generalists started many programmes after the First World War and simultaneously attracted supporters of the systematic aesthetic approach to literature with the aim to, as they used to say, cleanse literary study from sentimentalism and amateurism of the 19th century (Graff 2007: 121-122). Discussions concerning the role of literary criticism at the university did begin prior to that (1890s), and they would define most of the topics which would mark the most significant American literary school – New Criticism. In 1891, a renowned philologist John Fruit published the essay "A Plea for the Study of Literature from the

Aesthetic Standpoint” in PMLA in which he emphasized the importance of a systematic approach and understanding of the work of art itself. He was joined by Henry Shepard who claimed that the aesthetic brilliance of literature loses a lot when burdened with a philological approach, but neither of the two recognized a clear path for American literary criticism of the future. It would be defined shortly, in 1895, when M. W. Sampson clearly stated that American universities needed neither philology nor literary history (Graff 2007: 123), but that it was necessary that a student should confront the work of art itself and find a systematic approach to its interpretation.

The request for aesthetic criticism continued in the first two decades of the 20th century, but it united different interests and views. On one end of the extreme critical range, there were supporters of aesthetic formalism, such as Joel E. Spingarn who developed a theory in his work *Creative Criticism* (1917) that works of art were unique works of self-expression which should be judged based on their own characteristics, without relying on ethics. Like earlier critical reformers, Spingarn promoted critical development as a comprehensive system so that it could compete with philology under the same circumstances (Goldsmith 1979: 26-28). On the other end, the New Humanists represented another extreme view (Babbitt, Sherman, Foerster and More). They fought Spingarn’s aesthetic formalism accusing him of escapism, exclusiveness and anarchism: they were against his idea to isolate literary elements, because they believed that criticism had greater value if it focused on the relation to philosophy, ethics and “those general ideas” which academic literary study lacked (Graff 2007: 128). These confronting views on literature would later become opposing tendencies in New Criticism which would vary between the efforts to purify literature from social and moral impurities and to promote it as an aspect of knowledge which could save the world from science and industry.

This first major American critical school, New Criticism (1930s-1950s) was formed by a group of loosely connected critics who drew their moves from a variety of directions in order to define it. They all had one goal: to isolate literature as a separate discourse; to move it as far away as possible from philosophy, politics and history; to choose a systematic method and to encourage “close reading”. They were helped by the political situation in the 1930s which supported theories of propagandistic art (separation of art from politics), but also the situation at universities, which in a way was a prerequisite that New Criticism should terminate any connection

with social and cultural criticism. The term itself, New Criticism, became a synonym for text recognition in a vacuum.

This termination did not occur suddenly and modern researchers of literary criticism, for instance Graff, claim that the first generation of New Critics cannot be called either aestheticians or its pure representatives, but “cultural critics” who harshly reacted against dehumanisation which occurred as a result of technological changes in society. Richard Ohmann (150) makes the conclusion that the year 1939, when the pact between Hitler and Stalin was signed, represented a milestone in American literary criticism both for the leftists and the rightists. The argument that politics of literature should be viewed within its form was slowly transferred to the idea that literature could not contain politics (Graff 2007: 150). This was precisely why the decisive years for the introduction of literary criticism to the American university would be those years when the intellectuals separated themselves from political events.

This happened in the late thirties (1937-1940), the period which became the turning point for the consolidation of literary criticism. At the same time, a few of the important critics and theoreticians started to teach at American universities (Ransom, Brooks, Warren, Tate, Schwarz, René Wellek), many of whom came from Europe and started the American literary criticism tradition through teaching, editing journals (*The Canyon Review*) or publishing books (*Understanding Poetry; Modern Poetry and Its Tradition*). They had to fight against prejudices, reinforced by the prejudice against Jews and everyone else who was inclined to bohemian behaviour. In the 1930s an antagonistic dialogue took place between conservative New Criticism and Marxist literary theoreticians. This dialogue has never stopped, it goes on even nowadays between second generation American deconstructionists and left-winged protagonists of cultural studies. Since the 1930s, American literary criticism has been struggling with various schools of formalism promoting linguistic, rhetorical, and epistemological attitudes and certain cultural movements promoting a sociological, psychological and political way of thinking. At worst, these two wings of academic literary criticism showed characteristic irregularities in reading: one neglected the reader and attributed overwhelming importance to the text, whereas the other empowered the reader to dominate over the text. One wing thought that a literary work began as a marvellous, semi-autonomous, aesthetic tool, the other conceptualized literature as a symptomatic cultural product founded in anthropological, economic,

social, and political history. One stream leaned towards conservative political views, and the other towards left-liberal and leftist perspectives. Still, this dialectic and allegorical division does not say much about micro-histories which have made American literary criticism since the 1930s (Leitch 2010: VIII).

However, what we can learn from these micro-histories is that the battle of the 1930s was definitely won by New Criticism, leaving on one side literary historians, biographers, and mythological criticism relatively isolated, and on the other marginalized journalists, linguists, textual biographers and radicals. Yet, in the late 1950s and 1960s another turn occurred: mythological criticism would ripen and, on the wave of philosophy from the Continent, would weaken the American school of formalism (New Criticism). This wave would bring from Europe existentialism, phenomenology, hermeneutics, structuralism, semiotics, deconstruction, neo-Marxism and post-Marxism. It would drain power from New Criticism and other emerging movements and schools (reception, feminism, ethnic studies, and cultural criticism of the New Left wing), and its end would be linked to the end of modernism and the beginning of postmodernism (Leitch 2010: viii-x).

The 1930s were marked by three important groups: the Marxists, the Chicago critics and the New York Intellectuals, but also the “Great Depression” which caused various socio-economic phenomena and cultural problems. In this nest, Marxist thought would be fostered as a vital power, as would socialism, communism, McCarthyism, Marxist philosophy and aesthetics, the Frankfurt School which would influence the development of American Marxism; three American Marxist critics would become prominent: V.F. Calverton who claimed that criticism was founded on social philosophy and that it should deal with ideological analysis; Granville Hicks who established the three main criteria of literary analysis of Marxist criticism (1. Subjects of literary works must be related to central questions of life 2. Literature must have the intensity which should provoke the reader’s participation 3. The author’s view of the world must be the view of the Proletariat); and Bernard Schmidt who would attack Marxist critics because of their separation of form and content, aristocratic formal criticism and important journals such as *Partisan Review* which tried for a long time to unite aesthetics and politics and thus played an important role in the history of American Marxist criticism since at one point it was supported by well-known American critics such as Edmund Wilson, Lionel Trilling, John

Dos Passos, Harold Rosenberg, Clement Greenberg and Sidney Hook). This happened in an atmosphere of mutual attacks: the representatives of New Criticism attacked Marxist critics and vice versa (Leitch 2010: xi-xii).

Nevertheless, all researchers of the American literary scene agreed in one aspect: the following New Critics had a pioneer role in the institutionalization of formal concepts and methods (Phase I): T.S. Eliot, I.A. Richards, and William Empson in England and John Crowe Ransom and Allan Tate in America, who back in the 1920s started to express ideas and to implement a practice which would form the New Criticism school a decade later. By the end of the 1940s, the main representatives of this school will be Eliot, Richards, Empson, Ransom, Tate, R. P. Blackmur, Clive Brooks, René Wellek, W.K. Wimsatt and to some degree Kenneth Burke, F. R. Leavis, and Yvor Winters. The journals which supported this school were Eliot's *The Criterion* and Leavis' *Scrutiny* in England, and *The Southern Review*, edited by Robert Penn Warren and Brooks, the *Kenyon Review* (Ransom) and the *Sewanee Review* (Tate). From the late 1940s to the late 1950s the movement lost its "revolutionary" aura and became mainstream, and its representatives produced complex canonical foundations to their theories (Wellek and Warren in *Theory of Literature, 1949*, and Brooks and Wimsatt in: *Literary Criticism: A Short History, 1957*). Some of these critics went a step further from the chosen method, for example Eliot (social criticism), Leavis (cultural criticism), Winters (moral criticism), Kenneth Burke (interdisciplinary approach). Owing to these visits to different approaches, the list of true representatives of the first generation of New Critics is not long (Ransom, Tate, Brooks). The fact that it acquired a cultural *status quo* separated it from other schools and brought it into the fourth phase of development in which it was used naturally and regarded as necessary. New Criticism ended its role in the late 1950s as an innovative and original school, since it was regarded as "normal criticism" by then or, simply said, only as "criticism" (Leitch 2010: 21-52). Leitch interprets its end as some sort of "immortality" which would not be reached by another American critical school ever again. ¹

¹ New Criticism differed from other literary criticism schools by its rigorous "close reading" of relatively short texts and more often poems. Its goal was to establish an unchangeable status in which literature was separated from those creating or using it. It exists independently: it *is*. The task of the critic is to judge the text in a way an object or machine is assessed, to evaluate if it works effectively. All its parts must work together: no part is unimportant. When a critic evaluates and assesses a text, he/she supposes that they will deal with a complex net of related words.

With the rise of structuralism and semiotics in the 1960s Eastern European formalism became extremely influential while the formalism of New Criticism became a scapegoat, since it was on the road to impoverish literary studies. New Criticism lost its influence as it could not contribute much more significantly to scientific, sociological or hermeneutical criticism. As a reaction to New Criticism, the Chicago School appeared as an aspect of alternative formalism although it did not enjoy significant influence in the 1950s and the 1960s. Its manifesto was the book *Critics and criticism: ancient and modern* (1952) written by six critics (Richard McKeon, Elder Olson, R.S. Crane, W.R. Keats, Norman Maclean and Bernard Weinberg) who dealt with the following subjects: restrictions of contemporary literary criticism, primarily New Criticism; pluralistic nature and permanent influence of past literary and critical theory (from Aristotle to Samuel Johnson); and philosophical or aesthetic and methodological principles necessary for certain modern criticism and poetics.² The main task of a critic was to examine the constituents of poetic units: the way in which poets completed their poetic goal. They viewed literature as a sum of *individual* texts and insisted on “constructive” modality of all texts; they emphasized that literary works were an aggregate of “elements” or “wholes”; they pointed out a lack of linguistic references and rhetorical figures; and underlined various wholes or genres and the dedication to evaluation of the effectiveness of literary compositions. The intention was to move the emphasis from the writer to the work, while positioning the critic as a poet and writer and the critic as a judge.

The path of American literary criticism was crossed by the New York intellectuals whose leading first-generation critics gathered around the journal *Partisan Review* in the late 1930s and sustained themselves until the early 1970s (1930s-1950s). The most important representatives were figures like Richard Chase, Irving Howe, Alfred Kazin, Philip Rahv and Lionel Trilling. Favourite genres were critical reviews and essays while they kept a critical, suspicious attitude towards the academic circles and bourgeois culture. They tackled avant-garde literary modernism and Marxist theory; they emphasized complexity, coherence, irony, rationalism, serenity of literature and rejected the parochial academic approach, attacked mass culture and opposed postmodernism harshly (Leitch 2010: 70-100).

² Owing to its affinity to the principles of Aristotle’s poetics, interest in “formalist” poetics and genre theory, the Chicago School is defined as Neo-Aristotelian.

The path of American literary criticism widened more and more and slowly branched out so that the New York Intellectuals could be joined by mythological criticism, which was active in the period between the 1930s and the 1980s and enormously popular from the 1940s to the mid-1960s. The main representatives include Francis Fergusson, Leslie Fiedler, Daniel Hoffman, Stanley Edgar Hyman, but also Joseph Campbell, Kenneth Burke, William Troy. They all regarded literature as a discipline which, to a greater or smaller extent, depended on the theory of myth and most often relied on European anthropology, philosophy, sociology, and folklore studies. They differed only by the angle from which they approached myth (reception, sociology, religion, “formalism”, history). Their success happened in the 1960s (Barber, Bodkin, Fry, Leavis, Fergusson, Fiedler, Chase) when mythological criticism entered the university (Leitch 2010: 100-128).

The activities on the main path of American literary criticism became more dynamic and exciting and very soon American philosophers criticizing phenomenology and existentialism appeared (these philosophies were rooted in Husserl’s and Sartre’s early continental philosophy) with the aim of confronting American formalism and mythological criticism. Relying on phenomenology, American literary critics, according to Leitch (Leitch 2010: 152), looked for the transformations in order to question not only impersonal epistemology and the style of criticism, but also to re-evaluate the canon. Unlike New Criticism, philosophical criticism did not influence well-developed pedagogical methods. Its greatest contribution to the university was its influence on the preservation of existentialism at American universities.

The path of American literary criticism significantly branched out in the late 1960s and the 1970s at the time of another powerful wave of continental philosophy over literary studies in the US. Four schools of American literary criticism are of particular importance: hermeneutics, structuralism, deconstruction and Marxism, whose branches intertwined with phenomenological, existential and psycho-analytic approaches (Leitch 2010: 154). Following the tradition of German hermeneutists, American hermeneutic critics (E.D. Hirsch, Richard Palmer, and William Spanos) developed their own projects based on the works of Heidegger and Gadamer and taking into account history, praising the reader and confronting American formalism. (Lentricchia 1983: 256-282) The main representatives of structuralism (Jonathan Culler, S. Chatman, Jared

Prince, and Robert Scholes) were intellectually rooted in different national traditions and stylistic analyses (despite the dominance of contemporary French tradition).

Among the first American critics who in the 1960s and the 1970s confronted New Criticism with deconstruction were Harold Bloom, Paul de Man, Geoffrey Hartman, J. Hillis Miller and Joseph Riddel. Leitch stresses that the only difference between New Criticism and American deconstruction is a change from spatial to serial concepts of poetic structure, the crossing from unity to heterogeneity as a dominant model of literary form and deconstructive indeciveness to produce textbooks, anthologies and pedagogical handbooks, which turned out to be an undesirable aspect of elitism. However, deconstruction triumphed in strengthening post-war academic professionalism.

The “Marxist” element of the second wave of continental philosophy appeared in the 1970s and the 1980s including, among others, Frederick Jameson, Frank Lentricchia, Edward Said and Gayatri Spivak. The cultural criticism of these young intellectual leftists was rooted in Sartre’s existential phenomenology, in Foucault’s structuralism, Derrida’s deconstruction, and Western neo-Marxist thought of the 20th century expressed in the projects of the Frankfurt School, Georg Lukacs and many others. Unlike the earliest American deconstructionists who had already been formed as critics when they turned to Derrida’s philosophy, these young left-wing critics were at the beginnings of their careers when they embraced the continental philosophy of the second wave with all its additions.

The paths of American literary criticism which constantly separated, but also spread, were described by Leitch in the late 1970s as a carnival which looked increasingly like a loosely connected hierarchy (Leitch 2010: 156), because New Criticism, Chicago criticism, the New York Intellectuals, mythological critics, phenomenologists, existentialists, deconstructionists, feminists, ethnic critics, neo-Marxists were active at the same time, as well as linguists, literary historians, biographers, journalists, bibliographers, poets, dramatists, novelists, who all wrote part-time literary criticism. Dissemination and proliferation of theoretical orientations in American literary criticism will continue in the following decades of the twentieth century and in the early 21st century.

American theory of reception, which became popular in the period from the 1960s to the 1980s, also comprises part of this carnival. Some of its most common characteristics include: the emphasis of the temporality

of reading, textual discontinuity related to literary unity; investigation of epistemological, linguistic, psychological and sociological elements, readers' constraint; it focused critical investigation on pedagogy; it encouraged didactic poetics; it supported the politics of liberal pluralism (which promoted readers' rights against recipes and dogmas of methodological doctrines); and it developed different types of readers (informed, ideal, actual, virtual..) (Leitch 2010: 181-203).

The success of American feminist criticism can symbolically be marked by the publication of Kate Millett's book *Sexual Politics* (1970) and Norton's monumental *Anthology of Literature by Women* edited by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in 1975. Within 15 years, many female critics, mostly born between 1934 and 1944, participated in the creation of feminist criticism, including Josephine Donovan, Judith Fetterley, Sandra Gilbert, Susan Gubar, Florence Howe, Annette Kolodny, Kate Millett, Lillian Robinson, Elaine Showalter, Gayatri Spivak and many other. What was common to the various methods and efforts among these feminist literary critics was a three-fold task: to expose patriarchal premisses and prejudices; to promote and re-assess literature written by women; to critically analyze the social and cultural context of literature and criticism (Leitch 2010: 262-283).

The black aesthetic movement was formed during the civil rights movement in the USA and it caused the "re-birth" of works written by black authors (poetry, drama, fiction). This is when black literature started to emerge, particularly in the works by writers-critics like Amiri Baraka and Larry Neal, editor Hoyt Fuller, and academic critics Addison Gayle, Stephen Henderson, and Darwin T. Turner to be joined in the 1970s and the 1980s by a younger generation of American black critics led by Houston A. Baker, Jr., and Henry L. Gates, Jr. Black feminism became prominent in the works of women writers such as Toni C. Bambara, Mary Evans, Audrey Lorde and Alice Walker, and in the texts of academic women critics: Barbara Christian, bell hooks, Gloria T. Hall, Barbara Smith, Erlene Statson, and Mary Hellen Washington (Leitch 2010: 283-312).

In the period from 1960 to the 1980s, cultural criticism asked for a change, liberation, new ways of dressing and speech, required new musical forms, literature, criticism, political participation, sexual moral, a different way of life, the spirit of resistance. Since they appeared at the time of abundance, many neo-leftists did not deal with economic issues, or European radical theories, and this is why political parties, disciplined staff and proletariat ethics became less important, and the Movement less

linked to classical Marxism and opened up to Freudian Marxism of the Frankfurt School. Therefore, many European Marxists (Adorno, Althusser, Benjamin, Bakhtin and Gramsci) arrived at American universities only after the fall of the new left-wing. In the 1960s a significant ironic turn took place: the “Marxism” of previous radicals was replaced by Third World radicalism: Fanon, Guevara, Mao (Leitch 2010: 312-347).

Since 1987 (Paul de Man) American literary criticism has discovered the main weaknesses of American literary criticism of *fin de siècle*. In 1987, feminist and ethnic critics who were either for or against deconstruction worked at Yale. Barbara Johnson and Henry L. Gates, Jr., Paul de Man’s students, started to expand the application of master techniques on the empire of history, politics and non-canonical literature (Miller 1991: 359-69). This affected the rising of left-oriented deconstructive criticism. De Man celebrated his colleagues and contemporaries from Yale (J. Hillis Miller and Jacques Derrida), who turned to ethnic and political criticism in the late 1980s and the 1990s. Miller’s *Ethics of Reading* and Derrida’s *Specters of Marx* (1993) are taken as the date of this turnover because of criticism directed at globalization and the American new world order (to which Derrida showed sympathies while discussing Karl Marx’s criticism of philosophy) (Leitch 2010: 347-351). However, deconstruction in America appeared too late to tackle politics and society.

Just like post-structuralism, especially its deconstructive branch, overpowered New Criticism, cultural studies and various historicisms suddenly vanquished the rule of deconstruction in the 1990s (Leitch 2010: 228-262). Broadly speaking, in the late 1980s a whole set of explicitly post-formalist critical groups became prominent. Most of them were indebted to deconstruction and post-structuralism. They included many new and revived schools and movements (Marxism and post-Marxism, feminism, ethnic criticism, African-American...). All of these revived movements and schools were forced to re-discover and create their own past. Still, the most glorious return to history came in the form of Stephen Greenblatt’s and Catherine Gallagher’s New Historicism where literary works were studied for investigating social issues, authorities, and institutional power.

In this carnival, post-colonial theory and criticism also turned to history; various methods encouraged it so that it would include a wide range of approaches: from Frank Fanon’s Third World Marxism to, as Leitch points out, Said’s Foucauldian anarchist secular humanism and Spivak’s Marxist deconstructive feminism (Leitch 2010: 262-371). Particularly influential,

according to Leitch, was Homi Bhabha's Lacanian-Derridian psychoanalytic criticism which accentuated the dynamics of forming postcolonial subjects' identities.

The problem of pan-ethnic identity and stereotypes have followed Native Americans for a long time: colonized, deprived of all rights, they were victims of genocide, and even today live as an underprivileged group. Only in the 1970s did their literary Renaissance begin, as well as the study and research of their literature by various methods and approaches: feminist, post-structuralist, colonial/post-colonial in important works such as *Native American Literature* by Paula Gunn Allen; the questions of hybridity, heteroglossia and frontier, tribal centrism/ sexism/ racism/ homophobia were raised, as well as the most important subject discussed by literary critics since the 1980s: whether it would be advantageous to join forces with other tribes or not (Leitch 2010: 351-359).

One of the biggest surprises has been the rise of queer theory since the 1990s, which arose under the auspices of feminism, gender studies, French post-structuralism, Foucault's criticism of genealogy of modernism and body, Derrida's deconstruction of traditional binary Western concepts (male/female) and the post-colonial revision of patriarchal psychoanalysis. The leading texts certainly include those written by Judith Butler (*Gender Trouble*, 1990); Eve Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990); Diana Fuss (*Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*, 1991), which focus on homophobia and heteronormativity / identity (Leitch 2010: 351-359).

One may conclude that in America in the institutionalization of theory in the postmodern age occurred quickly and on a wide scale. In the 1990s, the forces arising from a number of new "studies", areas and fields won, like environmental studies, popular culture, animal studies, academic studies. Most of them became semi-autonomous in their characteristics, main texts, publications, and a wide range of subjects. By the turn of the century, the model of studies replaced the model of schools and movements, which makes sense when it comes to a historically innovative, most recent wave of postmodern criticism and theory. American literary criticism by the beginning of the 21st century was so branched out that it looked enormous and impossible to comprehend!

Another distinctive feature of contemporary American literary theory and criticism is the interlacing of perspectives, which was first started in the 1970s by Gayatri Spivak, joining Marxism, feminism, deconstruction and Third World postcolonial theory. A large part of queer theory was the

amalgam of psychoanalysis and deconstruction combined with feminism and gender studies, which brought to confessionalism in literary criticism. Likewise, queer theory combined with various branches of ethnic studies. New Criticism resisted this phenomenon, which in this context meant that the third wave of postmodern literary criticism marked the moment of maximum expansion, unlike the period of maximum contraction typical of early American New Criticism of the 1960s (Leitch 2010: 366-371).

Dissemination of literary theory by periods and fields of literary and cultural studies caused the fragmentation of American literary criticism paths, which naturally brought to numerous definitions at the beginning of the 21st century: 1) it relates to a large number of schools, movements and many fields of cultural studies; 2) it refers to principles and procedures, methods, and critical self-reflection; structuralism and post-structuralism – mostly imported from France – often with the sign of an enormous or big theory; 3) it has become a professional tool of flexible, useful and possible tools, concepts and innovations; 4) it means professional common sense and historical new postmodernism. Thus American literary theory and criticism have become the discourse which crossed the disciplinary boundaries and obtained new meanings. One of the meanings is surely “post-theory” which some researchers tend to call “the end of theory”. It is the point at which we can conclude this story about the paths of American literary criticism, and we cannot disagree with many critics who have recognized at the “end of theory” its triumph and who have claimed that we all are in an empire of theory, regardless of the fact whether we are celebrating it or not (Bradford 2011: 163-86)!

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Радојка Вукчевић

ОДАБРАНИ ПУТЕВИ АМЕРИЧКЕ КЊИЖЕВНЕ КРИТИКЕ

Сажетак

У раду се испитује развој америчке књижевне критике од њених почетака до савременог доба. Прати се њена веза са европском традицијом, њено одвајање и поновно преплитање. препознаје се посебно и веома значајно место Нове критике. На крају се констатује постмодернистичка фрагментација мноштва школа америчке књижевне критике и коначно њен садашњи тријумф.