

Some Political Literary Criticism, Excerpts: 1864-2004

*from works on political, social, and cultural criticism of imaginative literature  
with a special emphasis on the nature and role of propaganda*

I agree with much but not nearly everything excerpted in this section. As far as the books as a whole go – as they seem to me – many are very good, plenty are solid, some are mixed, some are less insightful or unfortunate in part. On the whole, in my judgment, the works make some thoughtful and useful exploration of imaginative literature and its relation to society and people, to social and political change.

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- 1864 – Victor Hugo, *William Shakespeare*
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- 1883 – William Morris, *On Art and Socialism*
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- 1885, 1888 – Frederick Engels, Letters
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- 1898 – Leo Tolstoy, *What is Art?*
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- 1903 – Frank Norris, *The Responsibilities of the Novelist*
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- 1914 – Emma Goldman, *The Social Significance of Modern Drama*
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- 1924 – Upton Sinclair, *Mammonart: An Essay in Economic Interpretation*
- 1924 – Morris Edmund Speare, *The Political Novel: Its Development in England and in America*
- 1926 – W.E.B. DuBois, *African American Literary Criticism, 1773-2000*
- 1927 – Vernon Louis Parrington, *Main Currents in American Thought: An Interpretation of American Literature from the Beginnings to 1920*
- 1928 – Alain Locke, “Art or Propaganda?” *African American Literary Criticism*
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- 1931 – Edmund Wilson, *Axel’s Castle*
- 1932 – V. F. Calverton, *The Liberation of American Literature*
- 1934 – John Dewey, *Art as Experience*
- 1934 – Max Eastman, *Art and the Life of Action*
- 1935 – Joseph Freeman, “Introduction,” *Proletarian Literature in the United States*
- 1936 – James T. Farrell, “Literature and Propaganda,” *A Note on Literary Criticism*
- 1939 – Bernard Smith, *Forces in Literary Criticism*
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- 1940 – Roger Dattler, *The Plain Man and the Novel*
- 1940 – Edmund Wilson, “The Historical Interpretation of Literature,” *The Triple Thinkers*
- 1941 – Joseph Warren Beach, “Art and Propaganda,” *American Fiction: 1920-1940*
- 1941 – Kenneth Burke, “Literature as Equipment for Living,” *The Philosophy of Literary Form*
- 1941 – Kenneth Burke, “The Nature of Art Under Capitalism,” *The Philosophy of Literary Form*
- 1942 – Alfred Kazin, *On Native Grounds*
- 1943 – George Orwell, “The Freedom of the Press”
- 1947 – Philip S. Foner, *The Social Writings of Jack London*
- 1948 – Alex Comfort, *The Novel and Our Time*
- 1949 – James Baldwin, “Everybody’s Protest Novel,” *Notes of a Native Son* (1955)
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- 1950 – Ann Petry, “The Novel as Social Criticism,” *African American Literary Criticism, 1773-2000*
- 1953 – Gilbert Highet, “The Pleasures of Satire,” *People, Places, Books*
- 1955 – Joseph L. Blotner, “The Novel as Political Instrument,” *The Political Novel*
- 1955 – Ralph Ellison, “The Art of Fiction: An Interview,” *Shadow and Act* (1964)
- 1956 – Walter B. Rideout, *The Radical Novel in the United States—1900-1954*
- 1957 – Irving Howe, *Politics and the Novel*
- 1957 – Wimsatt and Brooks, *Literary Criticism: A Short History*
- 1958 – Maxwell Geismar, *American Moderns—From Rebellion to Conformity*
- 1958 – George Steiner, “Marxism and the Literary Critic,” *Language and Silence* (1967)
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- 1962 – Edwin Muir, *The Estate of Poetry*
- 1963 – Vernon Hall, Jr., *A Short History of Literary Criticism*
- 1963 – Robert E. Spiller, Ed. et. al., *Literary History of the United States*
- 1964 – Michael Millgate, *American Social Fiction*
- 1965 – Eudora Welty, “Must the Novelist Crusade” (1965), *The Eye of the Story* (1978)
- 1969 – Maxwell Geismar, “Introduction,” *New Masses: An Anthology of the Rebel Thirties* (Ed. Joseph North)
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- 1977 – Maxwell Geismar, *Reluctant Radical: A Memoir* [first published 2002]:
- 1978 – John Colmer, “The Writer as Critic of Society,” *Coleridge to Catch-22: Images of Society*
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- 1980 – Mary McCarthy, *Ideas and the Novel*
- 1980 – Edward Said, Ed., “Preface,” *Literature and Society*
- 1980 – Michael Wilding, *Political Fictions*
- 1981 – Toni Cade Bambara, “Foreword,” *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (Moraga and Anzaldúa, Eds.)
- 1983 – Terry Eagleton, “Conclusion: Political Criticism,” *Literary Theory: An Introduction*
- 1983 – A. P. Foulkes, *Literature and Propaganda*
- 1983 – Susan Rubin Suleiman, *Authoritarian Fictions*
- 1986 – Ishmael Reed, “Which State?” *Writin’ Is Fightin’*
- 1987 – Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands—La Frontera: The New Mestiza*
- 1987-1999 – Noam Chomsky, *The Chomsky Reader*, biographies, etc...
- 1987 – Barbara Harlow, *Resistance Literature*
- 1988 – Nadine Gordimer, *The Essential Gesture*
- 1988 – Vincent B. Leitch, *American Literary Criticism from the 30s to the 80s*
- 1989 – D. J. Taylor, “Writers, Politics and Society,” *A Vain Conceit: British Fiction in the 1980s*
- 1989 – Tom Wolfe, “Stalking the Billion-Footed Beast,” *Harpers*
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- 1990 – Toni Cade Bambara, *Black Women Writers at Work*
- 1990 – Audre Lorde, *Black Women Writers at Work*
- 1990 – Pancho Savery, “The Third Plane at the Change of the Century: The Shape of African-American Literature to Come,” *Left Politics and the Literary Profession* (Davis and Mirabella, Eds.)
- 1991 – bell hooks, “Narratives of Struggle,” *Critical Fictions: The Politics of Imaginative Writing* (Philomena Mariani, Ed.)

- 1991 – Maxine Hong Kingston, “The Novel’s Next Step,” *Critical Fictions: The Politics of Imaginative Writing* (Philomena Mariani, Ed.)
- 1993 – Barbara Foley, “Art or Propaganda,” *Radical Representations: Politics and Form in U.S. Proletarian Fiction, 1929-1941*
- 1993 – Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*
- 1994 – Dorothy Allison, *Skin: Talking About Sex, Class & Literature*
- 1994 – Michael Hanne, *The Power of the Story: Fiction and Political Change*
- 1995 – Sharon M. Harris, *Redefining the Political Novel: American Women Writers, 1797-1901*
- 1995 – Jane Smiley, “Say It Ain’t So, Huck: Second Thoughts on Mark Twain’s ‘Masterpiece’,” *Harpers*, December
- 1998 – John Whalen-Bridge, *Political Fiction and the American Self*
- 1999 – Barbara Kingsolver, Bellwether Prize, [www.bellwetherprize.org](http://www.bellwetherprize.org)
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- 2000 – Kathryn Hume, *American Dream, American Nightmare: Fiction Since 1960*
- 2002 – B. R. Meyers, *A Reader’s Manifesto: An Attack on the Growing Pretentiousness in American Literary Prose*
- 2003 – Howard Zinn, *Artists in Times of War*

### Fiction and Politics: Excerpts From Some Recent Articles

- 2002, April 6 – John Pilger, “Hollywood Hurrah,” [www.pilger.carlton.com](http://www.pilger.carlton.com)
- 2002, June 26 – John Pilger, “Our Writers’ Failure (I),” [www.zmag.org](http://www.zmag.org)
- 2002, July 26 – John Pilger, “Our Writers’ Failure (II),” *New Statesman*
- 2002, September 29 – Arundhati Roy, “Come September,” [www.zmag.org](http://www.zmag.org)
- 2003, November 10 – John Pilger, “The Silence of Writers,” [www.zmag.org](http://www.zmag.org)
- 2004, January 1 – Margo Hammond and Ellen Heltzel, “The Plot Thickens at the *New York Times Book Review*,” [www.poynter.org](http://www.poynter.org)
- 2004, March 8 – Andrew O’Hehir, “‘The Fountain at the Center of the World’ by Robert Newman,” [www.salon.com](http://www.salon.com)
- 2004, May 27 – Heather Lee Schroeder, “Political fiction inspires thought, debate on issues,” *Capitol Times*, [www.madison.com](http://www.madison.com)
- 2004, June 30 – Ardain Isma, “Novel Injustices: Whither the Contemporary Novel?” [www.justresponse.net](http://www.justresponse.net)
- 2004, October 1 – Ira Chernus, “Presidential Fiction: The Story Behind the Debates,” [www.tomdispatch.com](http://www.tomdispatch.com)
- 2004, October 10 – Fred Kaplan, “Truth Stranger than ‘Strangelove’,” *New York Times*
- 2004 – Larry Beinhart, “Politics & Mysteries,” [www.thelibrarian.biz](http://www.thelibrarian.biz)
- 2004, November 12 – Andre Vltchek, “Are We Alone, Arundhati Roy?” [www.zmag.org](http://www.zmag.org)

(1864) Victor Hugo, *William Shakespeare*: To work for the people, – that is the great and urgent necessity. The human mind – an important thing to say at this minute – has a greater need of the ideal even than of the real. It is by the real that we exist; it is by the ideal that we live. Now, do you wish to realize the difference? Animals exist, man lives. To live, is to understand. To live, is to smile at the present, to look toward posterity over the wall. To live, is to have in one's self a balance, and to weigh in it the good and evil. To live, is to have justice, truth, reason, devotion, probity, sincerity, common-sense, right, and duty nailed to the heart. To live, is to know what one is worth, what one can do and should do. Life is conscience. Cato would not rise before Ptolemy. Cato lived. Literature is the secretion of civilization, poetry of the ideal. That is why literature is one of the wants of societies. That is why poetry is a hunger of the soul. That is why poets are the first instructors of the people...(257).

We have just said, "Literature is the secretion of civilization." Do you doubt it? Open the first statistics you come across. Here is one which we find under our hand: Bagne de Toulon, 1862. Three thousand and ten prisoners. Of these three thousand and ten convicts, forty know a little more than to read and write, two hundred and eighty-seven know how to read and write, nine hundred and four read badly and write badly, seventeen hundred and seventy-nine know neither how to read nor write...(258). The transformation of the crowd into the people, – profound labour! It is to this labour that the men called socialists have devoted themselves during the last forty years. The author of this book, however insignificant he may be, is one of the oldest in the labour; "Le Dernier Jour d'un Condamné" dates from 1828, and "Claude Gueux" from 1834. He claims his place among these philosophers because it is a place of persecution. A certain hatred of socialism, very blind, but very general, has been at work most bitterly among the influential classes. (Classes, then, are still in existence?) Let it not be forgotten, socialism, true socialism, has for its end the elevation of the masses to the civic dignity, and therefore its principal care is for moral and intellectual cultivation. The first hunger is ignorance; socialism wishes then, above all, to instruct. That does not hinder socialism from being calumniated, and socialists from being denounced. To most of the infuriated, trembling cowards who have their say at the present moment, these reformers are public enemies. They are guilty of everything that has gone wrong...(259).

The democratic idea, the new bridge of civilization, undergoes at this moment the formidable trial of overweight. Every other idea would certainly give way under the load that it is made to bear. Democracy proves its solidity by the absurdities that are heaped on, without shaking it. It must resist everything that people choose to place on it. At this moment they try to make it carry despotism...(260). That history has to be re-made is evident. Up to the present time, it has been nearly always written from the miserable point of view of accomplished fact; it is time to write from the point of view of principle, – and that, under penalty of nullity...(347).

**(1883)** William Morris, *On Art and Socialism*: “You may well think I am not here to criticize any special school of art or artists, or to plead for any special style, or to give you any instructions, however general, as to the practice of the arts. Rather I want to take counsel with you as to what hindrances may lie in the way towards making art what it should be, a help and solace to the daily life of all men.... Since I am a member of a Socialist propaganda I earnestly beg those of you who agree with me to help us actively, with your time and your talents if you can, but if not, at least with your money, as you can.... Help us now, you whom the fortune of your birth has helped to make wise and refined; and as you help us in our work-a-day business toward the success of the cause, instill into us your superior wisdom, your superior refinement, and you in your turn may be helped by the courage and hope of those who are not so completely wise and refined. Remember we have but one weapon against that terrible organization of selfishness which we attack, and that weapon is Union” (108-127).

**(1885)** Frederick Engels, Letter to Minna Kautsky (1885), in *Literature and Art* [Marx and Engels], 1947 (also excerpted and translated somewhat differently by George Steiner in “Marxism and the Literary Critic,” 1958, in *Language and Silence*, 1967): “It is always bad for an author to be infatuated with his hero, and it seems to me that in this case [Minna Kautsky’s novel *Old and New*] you have given way somewhat to this weakness... I am not at all an opponent of tendentious poetry as such. The father of tragedy, Aeschylus, and the father of comedy, Aristophanes, were both decidedly tendentious poets, just as were Dante and Cervantes; and the main merit of Schiller’s *Craft and Loves* is that it is the first German political propaganda drama. The modern Russians and Norwegians, who are writing splendid novels, are all tendentious. But I think that the bias [thesis] should flow by itself from the situation and action, without particular indications [explicit display], and that the writer is not obliged to obtrude on the reader the future historical solutions of the social conflicts pictured. And especially in our conditions the novel appeals mostly to readers of bourgeois circles, that is, not directly related to us, and therefore a socialist-biased novel fully achieves its purpose, in my view, if by conscientiously describing the real mutual relations, breaking down conventional illusions about them, it shatters the optimism of the bourgeois world, although the author does not offer any definite solutions or does not even line up openly on any particular side.... And in Stefan you showed that you are able to view your heroes with that fine irony which demonstrates the power of the writer over his creation.”

**(1888)** Frederick Engels, Letter to Margaret Harkness (excerpted by George Steiner in “Marxism and the Literary Critic,” 1958, in *Language and Silence*, 1967): “I am far from finding fault with you for not having written a point-blank socialist novel, a ‘*Tendenzroman*’ as we Germans call it, to glorify the social and political views of the author. That is not at all what I mean. The more the opinions of the author remain hidden, the better for the work of art.”

**(1898)** Leo Tolstoy, *What is Art?*: “This investigation has brought me to the conviction that almost all that our society considers to be art, good art, and the whole of art, far from being real and good art and the whole of art, is not even art at all but only a counterfeit of it.... In our society the difficulty of recognizing real works of art is further increased by

the fact that the external quality of the work in false productions is not only no worse, but often better, than in real ones; the counterfeit is often more effective than the real, and its subject more interesting... There is one indubitable sign distinguishing real art from its counterfeit—namely, the infectiousness of art...”

(1903) Frank Norris, *The Responsibilities of the Novelist*: ““The novel must not preach,’ you hear them say. As though it were possible to write a novel without a purpose, even if it is only the purpose to amuse. One is willing to admit that this savors a little of quibbling, for ‘purpose’ and purpose to amuse are two different purposes. But every novel, even the most frivolous, must have some reason for the writing of it, and in that sense must have a ‘purpose’. Every novel must do one of three things—it must tell something, (2) show something, or (3) prove something. Some novels do all three of these; some do only two; all must do at least one.... The third, and what we hold to be the best class, proves something, draws conclusions from a whole congeries of forces, social tendencies, race impulses, devotes itself not to a study of men but of man. In this class falls the novel with the purpose, such as ‘Les Miserables’. And the reason we decide upon this last as the highest form of the novel is because that, though setting a great purpose before it as its task, it nevertheless includes, and is forced to include, both the other classes.... [The novel] may be a great force, that works together with the pulpit and the universities for the good of the people, fearlessly proving that power is abused, that the strong grind the faces of the weak, that an evil tree is still growing in the midst of the garden, that undoing follows hard upon unrighteousness, that the course of Empire is not yet finished, and that the races of men have yet to work out their destiny in those great and terrible movements that crush and grind and rend asunder the pillars of the houses of the nations” (203-207).

(1914) Emma Goldman, *The Social Significance of Modern Drama*: “[George Bernard Shaw wrote,] ‘I am not an ordinary playwright in general practice. I am a specialist in immoral and heretical plays. My reputation has been gained by my persistent struggle to force the public to reconsider its moral. In particular, I regard much current morality as to economic and sexual relations as disastrously wrong; and I regard certain doctrines of the Christian religion as understood in England to-day with abhorrence. I write plays with the deliberate object of converting the nation to my opinions in these matters’” (96).

“This confession of faith should leave no doubt as to the place of George Bernard Shaw in modern dramatic art. Yet, strange to say, he is among the most doubted of his time. That is partly due to the fact that humor generally serves merely to amuse, touching only the lighter side of life. But there is a kind of humor that fills laughter with tears, a humor that eats into the soul like acid, leaving marks often deeper than those made by the tragic form....

“‘Major Barbara’ is one of the most revolutionary plays. In any other but dramatic form the sentiments uttered therein would have condemned the author to long imprisonment for inciting to sedition and violence.

“‘Shaw the Fabian would be the first to repudiate such utterances as rank Anarchy, ‘impractical, brain cracked and criminal.’ But Shaw the dramatist is closer to life—closer

to reality, closer to the historic truth that the people wrest only as much liberty as they have the intelligence to want and the courage to take” (107).

**(1924)** Upton Sinclair, *Mammonart: An Essay on Economic Interpretation*: The book purposes to investigate the whole process of art creation, and to place the art function in relation to the sanity, health and progress of mankind. It will attempt to set up new canons in the arts, overturning many of the standards now accepted. A large part of the world’s art treasures will be taken out to the scrap-heap, and a still larger part transferred from the literature shelves to the history shelves of the world’s library.

Since childhood the writer has lived most of his life in the world’s art. For thirty years he has been studying it consciously, and for twenty-five years he has been shaping in his mind the opinions here recorded; testing and revising them by the art-works which he has produced, and by the stream of other men’s work which has flowed through his mind. His decisions are those of a working artist, one who has been willing to experiment and blunder for himself, but who has also made it his business to know and judge the world’s best achievements.

The conclusion to which he has come is that mankind is today under the spell of utterly false conceptions of what art is and should be; of utterly vicious and perverted standards of beauty and dignity. We list six great art lies now prevailing in the world, which this book will discuss:

Lie Number One: the Art for Art’s Sake lie; the notion that the end of art is in the art work, and that the artist’s sole task is perfection of form. It will be demonstrated that this lie is a defensive mechanism of artists run to seed, and that its prevalence means degeneracy, not merely in art, but in the society where such art appears.

Lie Number Two: the lie of Art Snobbery; the notion that art is something esoteric, for the few, outside the grasp of the masses. It will be demonstrated that with few exceptions of a special nature, great art has always been popular art, and great artists have swayed the people.

Lie Number Three: the lie of Art Tradition; the notion that new artists must follow old models, and learn from the classics how to work. It will be demonstrated that vital artists make their own technique; and that present-day technique is far and away superior to the technique of any art period preceding.

Lie Number Four: the lie of Art Dilettantism; the notion that the purpose of art is entertainment and diversion, an escape from reality. It will be demonstrated that this lie is a product of mental inferiority, and that the true purpose of art is to alter reality.

Lie Number Five: the lie of the Art Pervert; the notion that art has nothing to do with moral questions. It will be demonstrated that all art deals with moral questions; since there are no other questions.

Lie Number Six: the lie of Vested Interest; the notion that art excludes propaganda and has nothing to do with freedom and justice. Meeting that issue without equivocation, we assert:

*All art is propaganda. It is universally and inescapably propaganda; sometimes unconsciously, but often deliberately, propaganda.*

As commentary on the above, we add, that when artists or art critics make the assertion that art excludes propaganda, what they are saying is that their kind of propaganda is art, and other kinds of propaganda are not art.

(1924) Morris Edmund Speare, *The Political Novel: Its Development in England and in America*: “The political novel has now become definitely established as a genre in English letters... It is a literary form which found its sources in that large parent body of English imaginative thought of an earlier century, a parent body which gave rise, in the nineteenth century, to so many diversified types of novel writing. In the twentieth century it has already challenged the attention of several of the most thoughtful English and American writers. A history of what novelists have already done must, perforce, energize the novelists of to-morrow to try their hands, in turn, at a peculiarly fascinating medium of expression, and one which is but in its first stages of development....

“What is a political novel? *It is a work of prose fiction which leans rather to ‘ideas’ than to ‘emotions’; which deals rather with the machinery of law-making or with a theory about public conduct than with the merits of any given piece of legislation; and where the main purpose of the writer is party propaganda, public reform, or exposition of the lives of the personages who maintain government, or of the forces which constitute government. In this exposition the drawing-room is frequently used as a medium for presenting the inside life of politics.* This is my definition of a *genre* in English letters whose history I shall attempt to trace...” (viii-ix).

“In the political world [an author] had to know his material not as a reporter knows the facts which he has covered in an ‘assignment,’ nor even as some scholar probes and garners the fruits of his study, but rather as the fisherman knows the sea or the ploughman follows his furrow. To be able to wed politics to art and bring about a consummation where neither the first became tractarian or statistical nor the other too honey-sweet, required not only an imagination of a particularly high order, but a knowledge of material which had been gathered at first hand, with the accuracy which only a participant himself could possess. One had to be able to think in political formulae, to adorn his thoughts in the natural imagery of the political life. Then only could he interpret it intelligently and interestingly to the reader” (15).

“We deal here with a *genre* of the novel which, if excellently developed, must make its appeal to the reader not primarily as a social force but as an *intellectual force*. Dickens and Thackeray, in 19<sup>th</sup> century literature are, for example, essentially *social writers*. Their men and women, for the most part persons out of everyday life, may even be portrayed before us as monsters of a caricature...yet...they live in our minds long after we have forgotten the plot in which they appeared; they seem to be creatures of flesh and blood,

more true to our everyday life than are one half of our acquaintances. The *social writer* throws an air of common humanity about his creations; he deals with incidents that are not unusual to the daily lives of all of us; his streets, and homes, and schools, and interiors we have visited and known for many years...

“But the writer in the world of politics is not dealing with a common humanity.... By the very reach and grasp which the genre of the political novel possesses, it is the most embracing in its material of all other novel types... Wars, industrial adventure, economic adjustment, commercial progress, diplomacy in foreign lands, social experiences of every kind, education, art, science, discovery and exploration, expansion and internal development—all are grist for his mill, all may be gathered into his dragnet, if the writer pleases to make use of them...

“And yet, peculiarly enough, in spite of the fullness of representation which this material allows its writer, in spite of the reach of the arc of life which he may include in a single work in this *milieu*, the political novelist must, indeed, be the most selective of all novel writers. Dickens and Thackeray, and Henry James, as social writers, deal with men and women as men and women: the variety of common human emotions they may report is endless, and the more usual and familiar they are to us the better it is for those writers. But the political novelist, if he is to be true to his craft, must be dominated, more often than not, by *ideas* rather than by *emotions*...the presentation of powerful forces working across large areas, of customs and forces potent in their influences upon the national life, and not the simple habits and prejudices and country-church yard epithets of an unsung humanity. That is what we mean by an *intellectual* interpretation of the novel, not a social one....

“There is yet another aspect in the contrast between the political novelist and the work of the social writer. The latter, by the very nature of his material, uses scenes, passions, and moods all of which fall within the shadow of an ordinary reader’s ordinary life. They may appeal, therefore, instantly to his comprehension; they lie at once within the range of his interpretation; they call forth his natural sympathies. The extent which this common, social appeal of the novelist makes upon the reader’s own experiences marks often the measure of his subsequent popularity. But in the political novel the most dramatic and the most productive characters are, by their very greatness, the more removed from the ordinary world of ordinary men and women....

“The political novelist has, therefore, by the intellectual milieu in which he is at work, many difficulties to overcome before he may draw a spark and then fan it into a flame of enthusiasm in the minds and hearts of the reading class, which is everywhere a democratic class. He finds that success in this field requires that he perform adequately a two-fold task: he must not only be able to create his character, and paint his situation accurately, but he must also bring down from the heights on which they live both character and situation; he must translate both for us into our own experience and embody them in such forms that we may understand them and be fascinated by them. The act of doing so may not require a greater technique than that employed by the social writer; but it is an entirely different technique. The former writes of things and in language so that he who runs may read; he does not have to educate his audience as well....

“And if he succeeds in endowing his characters and his situations with warmth, color, and vitality, and if his world of statesmen, diplomats, and all lesser figures—man,

woman, and idealized youth—are spread in an intelligible pageant before us, there is yet a philosophy of politics, so to speak, to represent in a legitimately artistic manner....

“The attempt, then, to combine impersonated characters with fiction, and to add to the result some significant political or social moral, aside from acting as a check upon the genius of every writer in this field except only the greatest writer... is fraught with peril. It is unfortunate indeed that in this milieu the critic is swift to find what may easily be termed ‘propaganda’ when it is actually nothing but an impassioned view of some political ideal of the novelist’s... It is not difficult to make out a case for the statement that in a sense all art is propaganda... How far one may keep one’s self out of a book where ideas are brought into full play, how far one may present sharply and appealingly and yet not be accused of ‘bringing firearms into an orchestra,’ is a difficult question to answer. Someone has said that one of the main tendencies in American literature since 1870 has been its use as an instrument to agitate, and to carry out investigations and reforms of various kinds. Has then all that recent literature—and particularly the novel of the last five decades—been forever damned as works of art? [...] Has that destroyed their validity as great artists?”

“In one form or another what may seem the illegitimate marriage of Beauty with Use will always be a skeleton in the novelist’s closet, which he must either destroy or disown...” (21-28).

“So vast and varied is the [American] landscape, that we have already taken for granted the fact that ‘the great American novel’ will never be written because no such work could ever contain a picture of the energy of New England with the charm of the South, and reflect the buoyancy of California and the intrepidity of the middle West. And yet, in the genre of the political novel there seems to be offered the one great vehicle where something of the fusion of north, south, east, and west may take place, and where the writer may produce in fiction what is truly typical of the American people just as Walt Whitman produced it in poetry. Here is a form which offers a great latitude of plot development, permits an untold variety of background, and can present countless numbers of national and local types each novel in situation. And in spite of all this flexibility of content, the political novel must deal with one thing common to all,—the great Experiment of popular democracy in America” (335).

(1926) W.E.B. DuBois, *African American Literary Criticism, 1773-2000* (Hazel Arnett Ervin, Ed.): “...all art is propaganda and ever must be, despite the wailing of the purists. I stand in utter shamelessness and say that whatever art I have for writing has been used always for propaganda for gaining the right of black folk to love and enjoy. I do not care a damn for any art that is not used for propaganda.”

(1927) Vernon Louis Parrington, *Main Currents in American Thought: An Interpretation of American Literature from the Beginnings to 1920*: “I have undertaken to give some account of the genesis and development of American letters of certain germinal ideas that have come to be reckoned traditionally American—how they came into being here, how they were opposed, and what influence they have exerted in determining the form and scope of our characteristic ideals and institutions. In pursuing such a task, I have chosen to follow the broad path of our political, economic, and social development, rather than the narrower belletristic; and the main divisions of the study have been fixed by forces

that are anterior to literary schools and movements, creating the body of ideas from which literary culture eventually springs. The present volume carries the account from early beginnings in Puritan new England to the triumph of Jefferson and back-country agrarianism. Volume II concerns itself with the creative influence in American of French romantic theories, the rise of capitalism, and the transition from an agricultural to an industrial order; and Volume III will concern itself with the beginnings of dissatisfaction with the regnant middle class, and the several movements of criticism inspired by its reputed shortcomings....”

“That our colonial literature seems to many readers meagre and uninteresting, that it is commonly squeezed into the skimpiest of chapters in our handbooks of American literature, is due, I think, to an exaggerated regard for esthetic values. Our literary historians have labored under too heavy a handicap of the genteel tradition—to borrow Professor Santayana’s happy phrase—to enter sympathetically into a world of masculine intellects and material struggles. They have sought daintier fare than polemics, and in consequence mediocre verse has obscured political speculation, and poetasters have shouldered aside vigorous creative thinkers. The colonial period is meagre and lean only to those whose ‘disedged appetites’ find no savor in old-fashioned beef and puddings. The seventeenth century in America as well as in England was a *saeculum theologicum*, and the eighteenth century was a *saeculum politicum*. No other path leads so directly and intimately into the heart of those old days as the thorny path of their theological and political controversies; and if one will resolutely pick his way amongst the thorns, he will have his reward in coming close to the men who debated earnestly over the plans and specifications of the Utopia that was to be erected in the free spaces of America, and who however wanting they may have been in the lesser arts, were no mean architects and craftsmen for the business at hand. The foundations of a later America were laid in vigorous polemics, and the rough stone was plentifully mortared with idealism. To enter once more into the spirit of those fine old idealisms, and to learn that the promise of the future has lain always in the keeping of liberal minds that were never discouraged from their dreams, is scarcely a profitless undertaking, nor without meaning to those who like Merlin pursue the light of their hopes where it flickers above the treacherous marshlands.”

“This much is clear [as of 1920]: an industrialized society is reshaping the psychology fashioned by an agrarian world; the passion for liberty is lessening and the individual, in the presence of creature comforts, is being dwarfed; the drift of centralization is shaping its inevitable tyrannies to bind us with. Whether the quick concern for human rights, that was the novel bequest of our fathers who had drunk of the waters of French romantic faith, will be carried over into the future, to unhorse the machine that now rides men and to leaven the sodden mass that is industrial America, is a question to which the gods as yet have given no answer. Yet it is not without hope that intelligent America is in revolt. The artist is in revolt, the intellectual is in revolt, the conscience of America is in revolt....”

**(1928) Alain Locke, “Art or Propaganda?” *African American Literary Criticism, 1773-2000* (Hazel Arnett Ervin, Ed.):** “Propaganda itself is preferable to shallow, truckling imitation. Negro things may reasonably be a fad for others; for us they must be

a religion. Beauty, however, is its best priest and psalms will be more effective than sermons.”

(1931) **Edmund Wilson**, *Axel's Castle: A Study in the Imaginative Literature of 1870-1930*: “I believe therefore that the time is at hand when these writers, who have largely dominated the literary world of the decade 1920-30, though we shall continue to admire them as masters, will no longer serve us as guides. ...the private imagination in isolation from the life of society seems to have been exploited and explored as far as for the present is possible. Who can imagine this sort of thing being carried further than Valéry and Proust have done? And who hereafter will be content to inhabit a corner, though fitted out with some choice things of one's own, in the shuttered house of one of these writers—where we find ourselves, also, becoming conscious of a lack of ventilation?

“The reaction against nineteenth-century naturalism which Symbolism originally represented has probably now run its full course, and the oscillation which for at least three centuries has been taking place between the poles of objectivity and subjectivity may return toward objectivity again: we may live to see Valéry, Eliot and Proust displaced and treated with as much intolerance as those writers—Wells, France and Shaw—whom they have themselves displaced. Yet as surely as Ibsen and Flaubert brought to their Naturalistic plays and novels the sensibility and language of Romanticism, the writers of a new reaction in the direction of the study of man in his relation to his neighbor and to society will profit by the new intelligence and technique of Symbolism. Or—what would be preferable and is perhaps more likely—this oscillation may finally cease. Our conceptions of objective and subjective have unquestionable been based on false dualisms; our materialisms and idealisms alike have been derived from mistaken conceptions of what the researches of science implied—Classicism and Romanticism, Naturalism and Symbolism are, in reality, therefore false alternatives. ...our ideas about the ‘logic’ of language are likely to be very superficial. The relation of words to what they convey—that is, to the processes behind them and the processes to which they give rise in those who listen to or read them—is still a very mysterious one. We tend to assume that being convinced of things is something quite different from having them suggested to us; but the suggestive language of the Symbolist poet is really performing the same sort of function as the reasonable language of the realistic novelist or even the severe technical languages of science” (231-234).

(1932) **V.F. Calverton**, *The Liberation of American Literature*: “Genuine proletarian criticism has seldom sought to deny the importance of literary values because of its desire for social significances. On the contrary, except in the United States, revolutionary critics have often been harder taskmasters from the point of literary quality than aesthetic critics....

“The revolutionary critic should demand as much of the art he endorses as the reactionary [critic]. No revolutionary critic, for example, should deny that art in itself, in whatever form, is a trade just as pottery-making is, and as a trade it has its technique which has to be mastered if that which is produced is to be worthwhile. Revolutionary art has to be good art first before it can have deep meaning, just as apples in a revolutionary country as well as in a reactionary country have to be good apples before they can be eaten with enjoyment. The fact that the pottery or the apples are the products of a

revolutionary culture—that is, made or grown by revolutionists—does not itself, or by any kind of special magic, make them good. It simply gives them a new form of ideological identification... [Great revolutionary] films are great not because they are [only progressive in ideology] but because they are great first in their formal organization, and then greater still because of the social purpose which they serve.

“The revolutionary proletarian critic does not aim to underestimate literary craftsmanship. What he contends is simply that literary craftsmanship is not enough. The craftsmanship must be utilized to create objects of revolutionary meaning. Only through this synthesis does the revolutionary critic believe that art can serve its most important purpose today. Revolutionary meanings without literary craftsmanship constitute as hopeless a combination from the point of view of the radical critic as literary craftsmanship without revolutionary purpose. If proletarian literature fails in so many instances in America, it is not because it is propagandistic—most of the literature of the world has been propagandistic in one way or another, including even that of William Shakespeare and George Bernard Shaw—but because it is lacking in qualities of craftsmanship.

“In a word, the revolutionary critic does not believe that we can have art without craftsmanship; what he does believe is that, granted the craftsmanship, our aim should be to make art serve man as a thing of action and not man serve art as a thing of escape.

“Proletarian writers are not necessarily proletarians...but they are writers who are imbued with a proletarian ideology instead of a bourgeois one. They are writers who have adopted the revolutionary point of view of the proletarian ideology in their work. That often they fail in such expression is inevitable in a transitional stage of society in which we are living in today. This much should be clear, however, and that is that proletarian writers are not to be confused with literary rebels. Literary rebels believe in revolt in literature; left-wing, that is proletarian, writers believe in revolt in life. The literary rebels, for example, who became the advocates of free verse as opposed to conventional verse must not be associated with proletarian writers, who are opposed to the society in which we live and aim to devote their literature to its transformation. Proletarian writers, then, are more interested in social revolt than in literary revolt. As a group they are convinced that present-day industrial society is based upon exploitation and injustice; that it creates distress and misery for the many and brings happiness only to the few; that its dedication to the ideal of profit instead of use is destructive of everything fine and inspiring in life; and that until its private-property basis is destroyed and replaced by the social control of all property, the human race will never be able to escape the horrors of unemployment, poverty, and war.

“More than that, proletarian writers believe that their literature can serve a greater purpose only when it contributes, first, toward the destruction of present-day society, and, second, toward the creation of a new society which will embody...a social, instead of an individualistic ideal. Unlike Ibsen, they do not ask questions and then refuse to answer them. Unlike the iconoclasts, they are not content to tear down the idols and stop there. Their aim is to answer questions as well as ask them, and to provide a new order to replace an old one. Their attitude, therefore, is a positive instead of a negative one” (459-462).

(1934) **John Dewey, *Art as Experience***: “The moral office and human function of art can be intelligently discussed only in context of culture. A particular work of art may have a definite effect upon a particular person or upon a number of persons. The social effect of the novels of Dickens or of Sinclair Lewis is far from negligible. But a less conscious and more massed constant adjustment of experience proceeds from the total environment that is created by the collective art of a time...” (344).

“The theories that attribute direct moral effect and intent to art fail because they do not take account of the collective civilization that is the context in which works of art are produced and enjoyed. I would not say that they tend to treat works of art as a kind of sublimated Aesop’s fables. But they all tend to extract particular works, regarded as especially edifying, from their milieu and to think of the moral function of art in terms of a strictly personal relation between the selected works and a particular individual. Their whole conception of morals is so individualistic that they miss a sense of the *way* in which art exercises its humane functions. Matthew Arnold’s dictum that ‘poetry is a criticism of life’ is a case in point...” (346).

(1934) Max Eastman, *Art and the Life of Action*: “In one issue of the New York Times—May 10, 1933—we learned from the Mexican Bolshevik artist, Diego Rivera, that ‘art which is not propaganda is not art at all,’ and from Hitler’s Minister of Education that ‘it is no longer art for art’s sake in Germany, but art for propaganda’s sake—otherwise it is not art.’ The German Bolshevik artist, George Grosz, had already declared that ‘The artist of our day, if he does not want to be an empty runner...can choose only between technique and class-struggle propaganda.’ And Mussolini recently expressed the same view by refusing to open the Style Show at Turin until all the slim girls in the mural had been washed down, and issuing an instruction to the press to accept for publication only such representations of the female figure as exemplify the ‘fully developed bust and hips appropriate to the fascist girl and mother.’ It seems well agreed on both sides of the barricades, that in the future at least art is to be crudely purposive, and the artist’s prestige to depend upon his service to a social or political cause” (3-4).

(1935) Joseph Freeman, “Introduction,” *Proletarian Literature in the United States*, Granville Hicks, Ed., et. al.: “To characterize an essay or a book as a political pamphlet is neither to praise nor to condemn it. Such pamphlets have their place in the world. In the case of the liberal critic, however, we have a political pamphlet which pretends to be something else. We have an attack on the theory of art as a political weapon which turns out to be itself a political weapon.... The liberal critic, the Man in White, wants us to believe that when you write about the autumn wind blowing a girl’s hair or about ‘thirsting breasts,’ you are writing about ‘experience’; but when you write about the October Revolutions, or the Five Year Plan, or the lynching of Negroes in the South, or the San Francisco strike you are not writing about ‘experience.’ Hence to say; ‘bed your desire among the pressing grasses’ is *art*; while *Roar China*, Mayakovsky’s poems, or the novels of Josephine Herbst and Robert Cantwell are *propaganda* .... If you were to take a worker gifted with a creative imagination and ask him to set down his experience honestly, it would be an experience so remote from that of the bourgeois that the Man in White would, as usual, raise the cry of ‘propaganda’” (9-12).

(1936) James T. Farrell, "Literature and Propaganda," *A Note on Literary Criticism*: "I think that literature must be viewed both as a branch of the fine arts and as an instrument of social influence. It is this duality, intrinsic to literature, that produces unresolved problems of literary criticism" (3). "I suggest that in the field of literature the formula 'All art is propaganda' be replaced by another: 'Literature is an instrument of social influence'.... [Literature] can be propaganda—in the more limited sense of my definition of propaganda; and it can sometimes perform an objective social function that approaches agitation. However, it often performs neither of these functions and yet does perform an objective social function... I am making these distinctions on the grounds of strategy and clarity, so that we may know what we are doing and what we are talking about. A leading critical confusion—as I have said—has arisen from using the word propaganda in various senses; then from hitching literature sometimes to one; sometimes to another, of these meanings; and finally from thinking that we have always had the same meanings in mind and that these meanings exhaust the roles that literature plays objectively in society, and subjectively upon the individual consciousness of the reader. In so doing, we have produced wasted polemics; and in confronting critics who oppose Marxism, revolutionary criticism has led with its chin; is it any wonder that opponents have leaped at it when such opportunities were offered?" (169-171).

(1939) Bernard Smith, *Forces in Literary Criticism*: "Socialist criticism in America may conveniently be dated from the founding of the *Comrade*—'An Illustrated Socialist Monthly'—in 1901.... The *Comrade* appeared at the beginning of the muckrake era. It was superior to the muckrakers in the clarity of its vision as to the basic cause of social evils and the way to cure them.... The aims of socialist critics were propagandistic, and it was inevitable that they should be paramount in a time when American critical systems were divided between art for art's sake, art for morality's sake, and various compromises between those two exhausted theories of esthetic purpose.<sup>1</sup> Consider the essays and lectures on the contemporary theatre by the anarchist Emma Goldman. Miss Goldman made no bones about her intentions. Her essay on 'The Modern Drama' in *Anarchism and Other Essays* (1911) was frankly a salute to its subject as an instrument for the dissemination of radical thought." (<sup>1</sup>"propaganda' is not used here as an invidious term. It is used to describe works consciously written to have an immediate and direct effect upon their readers' opinions and actions, as distinguished from works that are not consciously written for that purpose or which are written to have a remote and indirect effect. It is possible that conventional critics have learned by now that to call a literary work 'propaganda' is to say nothing about its quality as literature. By now enough critics have pointed out that some of the world's classics were originally 'propaganda' for something") (289-292).

"The socialist's affinity with realism was stated forcefully in the leading editorial of the *Masses* in February 1911—the second issue of a magazine... which was a successor, on a more mature and 'politicalized' level, to the *Comrade*. It said: 'It is natural that Socialists should favor the novel with a purpose, more especially, the novel that points a Socialist moral. As a reaction against the great bulk of vapid, meaningless, too-clever American

fiction, with its artificial plots and characters remote from actual life, such an attitude is a healthy sign ...”(289-290).

“Its militancy is the most obvious characteristic of American criticism since the war. In the whole of nineteenth century there was only one critic, Poe, who was deliberately and consistently disputatious. No one else made polemics the basis of a critical method. Whitman was a maverick, but he was exclamatory rather than argumentative. Now, however, it is customary for critics to be bellicose, and there are few who have let politeness stand in the way of controversy. The reason is not hard to find. Criticism in our time has been largely a war of traditions—a struggle between irreconcilable ideologies...” (302).

“The academy was growing up. It was beginning to share the emotions of serious adults who were trying to adjust themselves to an America become rich and imperialistic. In its own special field, literary history, it was beginning to achieve mature and realistic interpretations. In 1927 it came of age: V. L. Parrington, professor of English at the University of Washington, published the two completed volumes of his *Main Currents in American Thought*. With that work the academy was at last brought face to face with the ideas, sentiments, and historical methods of today.... Parrington’s *Main Currents* arrived to supply the most needed things: an account of our literary history which squared with recent works on the history of our people and a realistic technique for analyzing the relationship of a writer to his time and place—in addition to a militantly progressive spirit. Professorial and literary circles had consciously been waiting for such a work, and if the one that did come forth was far more radical than some people cared for, it simply could not be rejected. The author was a professor too; his scholarship defied scrutiny; and his ideas were couched in terms that were native American, most of them having come over shortly after the Mayflower. One must emphasize Parrington’s radicalism because it is probably the most significant aspect of his work. He sharpened, gave point to the economic interpretation of literary movements because of his desire to reveal the motivating interests and real direction of specific works of literature... (330-331).

“There was one critic who apparently possessed all the virtues—fine taste, poetic sensitiveness, intellectuality, an experimental inclination. His literary scholarship was beyond dispute, his writing deft and memorable. He was, moreover, a poet of the first rank, which gave his criticism of the art an extraordinary authority. He was universally respected: by Pound, by the later expatriates, by the impressionists of the *Dial*, by the *Hound and Horn* group. This critic was T. S. Eliot. His volume of essays, *The Sacred Wood*, published in 1920, is still considered to be one of the truly distinguished works of esthetic criticism produced in this century.... The reader will note that he is here described in the past tense. His works are many now, but *The Sacred Wood* alone is a consideration of esthetic problems. In the rest the emphasis is on the esthetic effects of moral and social beliefs. His development is one of the ‘consequences’ touched upon in the following chapter.... (358-359).

“[T.S. Eliot wrote,] ‘There are two and only two finally tenable hypotheses about life: the Catholic and the materialistic [i.e., Marxist]. It is quite possible, of course, that the future

may bring neither a Christian nor a materialistic civilization. It is quite possible that the future may be nothing but chaos or torpor. In that event, I am not interested in the future; I am only interested in the two alternatives which seem to me worthier of interest....' Eliot chose not only the Catholic hypothesis, but also its political corollaries. His literary opinions were thus given a firm philosophical base to rest upon, and from that fact he drew the reasonable conclusions...[that] 'Literary criticism should be completed by criticism from a definite ethical and theological standpoint. In so far as in any age there is common agreement on ethical and theological matters, so far can literary criticism be substantive. In ages like our own, in which there is no such common agreement, it is then more necessary for Christian readers to scrutinize their reading, especially of works of imagination, with explicit ethical and theological standards. The 'greatness' of literature cannot be determined solely by literary standards; though we must remember that whether it is literature or not can be determined only by literary standards.' To this has esthetic criticism at last come—to a realization that non-esthetic criteria are the ultimate tests of value. Whether they be called philosophical, moral, or social criteria, they are still the ideas that men have about the way human beings live together and the way they ought to live. The quest of beauty had become the quest of reality. It had become, in essence, literary criticism as socially conscious and as polemical as the criticism of the Marxists.... "Eliot spoke of alternatives, not of choices.... He believes that one of the alternatives has greater value, is nobler, is in a sense more real, than the other. The question is therefore not simply one of personal taste. It is a question of evidence and reason. But the alternative he favors admits of no evidence and derogates from reason. His philosophy is, in the last analysis, wholly mystical. It is not capable of being tested and verified and improved. The alternative he rejects is, on the other hand, the one that is favored by those who are determined to be as scientific as one can be in a non-physical field. The literary criticism of the neo-classicists is a criticism composed of obiter dicta inspired by intangible emotions. The literary criticism of the materialists stands or falls by the findings of the social scientists, psychologists, and historians. Eliot's alternative involves a revulsion against democracy; the materialists are partisans of democracy. The literary criticism of his school tends to create a literature that will express the sensibilities and experiences of a few fortunate men. The criticism of the opposing school tends to create a literature that will express the ideals and sympathies of those who look forward to the conquest of poverty, ignorance, and inequality—to the material and intellectual elevation of the mass of mankind...." (384-387).

(1940) Roger Dattler, *The Plain Man and the Novel*: "The propaganda novel is quite simply a story with a purpose. Not that every novel may not be interpreted as a story with a purpose; but there are some authors whose educative mission burns so ardently within them that it becomes impossible to consider any kind of writing save that of direct entreaty. There is little masking of the challenge. The banners flutter, the trumpets blare. The slogan flies to its appointed target. 'And now, men and women of America,' cries Mrs. Beecher Stowe, at the conclusion of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, 'is this [slavery] a thing to be trifled with, apologized for, and passed over in silence? Farmers of Massachusetts, of New Hampshire, of Vermont, of Connecticut, who read this book by the blaze of your winter-evening fire; strong-hearted, generous sailors and shipowners of Maine—is this a thing for you to countenance and encourage?' Such is the voice of the authentic

propagandist. The pointed moral, and a tale adorned thereby.” “It would be erroneous to suppose, however, that every type of propagandist found a field so favourable for opportunity as Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe. All too often in history the reformer has been compelled to clothe his meaning in parable and allegory. This was Rabelais’s method in dealing with the corruption of the mediaeval Church, and that of Swift and Voltaire with the vileness of eighteenth-century government. The heavy-witted saw only the facile story: the man of critical intelligence the rapier point beneath.” “The propaganda story, then, from sheer pressure of events, may shape itself to the half-concealed, the oblique approach. Perhaps the most famous example of this method is to be found in Nicolai Gogol’s *Dead Souls*. Primarily, *Dead Souls* is as much concerned with the problem of chattel slavery as *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*; but Gogol’s treatment is as far removed from that of Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe as the timber profusion of eighteenth-century Moscow from the primly ordered architecture of Hartford, Connecticut...” “How many real Socialists did [Upton Sinclair’s] *The Jungle* make? It is difficult to say. Very few indeed, if municipal elections between 1906 and 1936 count for anything. But perhaps the sum total of literary influence cannot be assessed by the mathematical habit. That Charles Dickens assisted the reform of the Poor Law, and Charles Reade that of the Victorian prison system, is undeniable; but exact measurement is beyond the reach of even the most ardent of social investigators. Such novels influence; but downright conversion is another matter. It is doubtful indeed if a novel of propaganda ever really converted anyone. That it may emphasize an atmosphere in which conversion becomes possible is perhaps as far as the Plain Man would care to go” (35-46).

(1940) Edmund Wilson, “The Historical Interpretation of Literature,” later published in *The Triple Thinkers*: “I want to talk about the historical interpretation of literature—that is, about the interpretation of literature in its social, economic and political aspects. To begin with, it will be worth while to say something about the kind of criticism which seems to be furthest removed from this. There is a comparative criticism which tends to be non-historical. The essays of T. S. Eliot, which have had such an immense influence in our time, are, for example, fundamentally non-historical. Eliot sees, or tries to see, the whole of literature, so far as he is acquainted with it, spread out before him under the aspect of eternity....”

“Another example of this kind of non-historical criticism, in a somewhat different way and on a somewhat different plane, is the work of the late George Saintsbury. Saintsbury was a connoisseur of wines; he wrote an entertaining book on the subject....”

“There is, however, another tradition of criticism which dates from the beginning of the eighteenth century. In the year 1725, the Neapolitan philosopher Vico published *La Scienza Nuova*, a revolutionary work on the philosophy of history, in which he asserted for the first time that the social world was certainly the work of man, and attempted what is, so far as I know, the first social interpretation of a work of literature....”

“In the field of literary criticism, this historical point of view came to its first complete flower in the work of the French critic Taine, in the middle of the nineteenth century. The whole school of historian-critics to which Taine belonged—Michelet, Renan, Sainte-

Beuve—had been occupied in interpreting books in terms of their historical origins. But Taine was the first of these to attempt to apply such principles systematically and on a large scale in a work devoted exclusively to literature. In the *Introduction to his History of English Literature*, published in 1863, he made his famous pronouncement that works of literature were to be understood as the upshot of three interfusing factors: *the moment, the race and the milieu...*”

“To Taine’s set of elements was added, dating from the middle of the century, a new element, the economic, which was introduced into the discussion of historical phenomena mainly by Marx and Engels. The non-Marxist critics themselves were at the time already taking into account the influence of the social classes... But Marx and Engels derived the social classes from the way that people made or got their livings—from what they called the *methods of production*; and they tended to regard these economic processes as fundamental to civilization.”

“The insistence that the man of letters should play a political role, the disparagement of works of art in comparison with political action, where thus originally no part of Marxism. They only became associated with it later. This happened by way of Russia, and it was due to the special tendencies in that country that date from long before the Revolution or the promulgation of Marxism itself. In Russia there have been very good reasons why the political implications of literature should particularly occupy the critics. The art of Pushkin itself, with its marvelous power of implication, had certainly been partly created by the censorship of Nicholas I, and Pushkin set the tradition for most of the great Russian writers that followed him. Every play, every poem, every story, must be a parable of which the moral is implied. If it were stated, the censor would suppress the book as he tried to do with Pushkin’s *Bronze Horseman*, where it was merely a question of the packed implications protruding a little too plainly. Right down through the writings of Chekhov and up almost to the Revolution, the imaginative literature of Russia presents the peculiar paradox of an art that is technically objective and yet charged with social messages. In Russia under the Tsar, it was inevitable that social criticism should lead to political conclusions, because the most urgent need from the point of view of any kind of improvement was to get rid of the tsarist regime. Even the neo-Christian moralist Tolstoy, who pretended to be non-political, was to exert a subversive influence.... Even after the Revolution had destroyed the tsarist government, this state of things did not change....”

“In my view, all our intellectual activity, in whatever field it takes place, is an attempt to give a meaning to our experience—that is, to make life more practicable; for by understanding things we make it easier to survive and get around among them....”

“And this brings us back to the historical point of view. The experience of mankind on the earth is always changing as man develops and has to deal with new combinations of elements; and the writer who is to be anything more than an echo of his predecessors must always find expression for something which has never yet been expressed, must master a new set of phenomena which has never yet been mastered....”

(1941) Kenneth Burke, "Literature as Equipment for Living," *The Philosophy of Literary Form*: "Here I shall put down, as briefly as possible, a statement in behalf of what might be catalogued, with a fair degree of accuracy, as a *sociological* criticism of literature. Sociological criticism is certainly not new. I shall try to suggest what partially new elements or emphasis I think should be added to this old approach. And to make the 'way in' as easy as possible, I shall begin with a discussion of proverbs. Examine random specimens in *The Oxford Dictionary of English Proverbs*. You will note, I think, that there is no 'pure' literature here. Everything is 'medicine.' Proverbs are designed for consolation or vengeance, for admonition or exhortation, for foretelling" (253).

(1941) Kenneth Burke, "The Nature of Art Under Capitalism," *The Philosophy of Literary Form*: "The present article proposes to say something further on the subject of art and propaganda. It will attempt to set forth a line of reasoning as to why the contemporary emphasis must be placed largely upon propaganda, rather than upon 'pure' art.... Since pure art makes for acceptance, it tends to become a social menace in so far as it assists us in tolerating the intolerable. And if it leads us to a state of acquiescence at a time when the very basis of moral integration is in question, we get a paradox whereby the soundest adjunct to ethics, the aesthetic, threatens to uphold an unethical condition. For this reason it seems that under conditions of competitive capitalism there must necessarily be a large corrective or propaganda element in art. Art cannot safely confine itself to merely *using* the values which arise out of a given social texture and integrating their conflicts, as the soundest, 'purest' art will do. It must have a definite hortatory function, an educational element of suasion or inducement; it must be partially *forensic*. Such a quality we consider to be the essential work of propaganda. Hence we feel that the moral breach arising from vitiation of the work-patterns calls for a propaganda art. And incidentally, our distinction as so stated should make it apparent that much of the so-called 'pure' art of the nineteenth century was of a pronouncedly propagandist or corrective coloring. In proportion as the conditions of economic warfare grew in intensity throughout the 'century of progress,' and the church proper gradually adapted its doctrines to serve merely the protection of private gain and the upholding of manipulated law, the 'priestly' function was carried on by the 'secular' poets, often avowedly agnostic.

"Our thesis is by no means intended to imply that 'pure' art or 'acquiescent' art should be abandoned. There are two kinds of 'toleration.' Even if a given state of affairs is found, on intellectualistic grounds, to be intolerable, the fact remains that as long as it is with us we must more or less contrive to 'tolerate' it. Even though we might prefer to alter radically the present structure of production and distribution through the profit motive, the fact remains that we cannot so alter it forthwith. Hence, along with our efforts to alter it, must go the demand for an imaginative equipment that helps to make it tolerable while it lasts. Much of the 'pure' or acquiescent art of today serves this invaluable psychological end. For this reason the great popular comedians or handsome movie stars are rightly the idols of the people. Likewise the literature of sentimentality, however annoying and self-deceptive it may seem to the hardened 'intellectual,' is following in a direction basically so sound that one might wish more of our pretentious authors were attempting to do the same thing more pretentiously. On the other hand, much of the harsh literature now being turned out in the name of the 'proletariat' seems

inadequate on either count. It is questionable as propaganda, since it shows us so little of the qualities in mankind worth saving. And it is questionable as 'pure' art, since by substituting a cult of disaster for a cult of amenities it 'promotes our acquiescence' to sheer dismalness. Too often, alas, it serves as a mere device whereby the neuroses of the decaying bourgeois structure are simply transferred to the symbols of workingmen. Perhaps more of Dickens is needed, even at the risk of excessive tearfulness" (271-278).

(1942) Alfred Kazin, *On Native Grounds: An Interpretation of Modern American Prose Literature*: "Our modern literature was rooted in those dark and still little-understood years of the 1880's and 1890's when all America stood suddenly, as it were, between one society and another, one moral order and another, and the sense of impending change became almost oppressive in its vividness. It was rooted in the drift to the new world of factories and cities, with their dissolution of old standards and faiths; in the emergence of the metropolitan culture that was to dominate the literature of the new period; in the Populists who raised their voices against the domineering new plutocracy in the East and gave so much of their bitterness to the literature of protest rising out of the West; in the sense of surprise and shock that led to the crudely expectant Utopian literature of the eighties and nineties, the largest single body of Utopian writing in modern times, and the most transparent in its nostalgia. But above all was it rooted in the need to learn what the reality of life was in the modern era. In a word, our modern literature came out of those great critical years of the late nineteenth century which saw the emergence of modern America, and was molded in its struggles.... We live in a day when the brilliance of some of our critics seems to me equaled only by their barbarism. In my study in Chapter XIV of the twin fanaticisms that have sought to dominate criticism in America since 1930—the purely sociological and the purely textual-'esthetic' approach—I have traced some of the underlying causes for the aridity, the snobbery, the sheer human insensitiveness that have weighted down so much of the most serious criticism of our day...." (viii-xi).

(1943) George Orwell, "The Freedom of the Press" (Excerpt from the suppressed preface to *Animal Farm*; published 1972 in the *Times Literary Supplement*, also 1993, in the *Everyman's Library* edition of *Animal Farm*): "The sinister fact about literary censorship in England is that it is largely voluntary. Unpopular ideas can be silenced, and inconvenient facts kept dark, without the need for any official ban. Anyone who has lived long in a foreign country will know of instances of sensational items of news—things which on their own merits would get the big headlines—being kept right out of the British press, not because the Government intervened but because of a general tacit agreement that 'it wouldn't do' to mention that particular fact. So far as the daily newspapers go, this is easy to understand. The British press is extremely centralized, and most of it is owned by wealthy men who have every motive to be dishonest on certain important topics. But the same kind of veiled censorship also operates in books and periodicals, as well as in plays, films and radio. At any given moment there is an orthodoxy, a body of ideas which it is assumed that all right-thinking people will accept without question. It is not exactly forbidden to say this, that or the other, but it is 'not done' to say it, just as in mid-Victorian times it was 'not done' to mention trouser in the presence of a lady. Anyone who challenges the prevailing orthodoxy finds himself

silenced with surprising effectiveness. A genuinely unfashionable opinion is almost never given a fair hearing, either in the popular press or in the highbrow periodicals.”

(1947) Philip S. Foner, *The Social Writings of Jack London*: “‘No American writer,’ said Fred Lewis Patee of Jack London, ‘has had a career more representative of his time.’ To this one should add that no American writer was a more articulate and splendid spokesman for his time. For it was Jack London more than any other writer of his day, who broke the ice that was congealing American letters and brought life and literature into a meaningful relation to each other.

“The end of the nineteenth century found the nation in a state of great social and political unrest. It found expression in the rise of the labor movement, furious battles between labor and capital, and the political conflict between farmers, workers and small businessmen on one hand and the powerful monopolies on the other. Yet throughout this turbulent period there was a curious dichotomy between literature and life....

“Beginning with Rebecca Harding Davis’ ‘Life in the Iron Mills’ in *The Atlantic* of April, 1861, probably the earliest treatment of the lives of industrial workers that approached realism, American fiction since the Civil War had occasionally piped a rather feeble note of social criticism....

“Upon this scene stepped several young writers who at the turn of the century blazed new trails in American literature. Influenced by the European naturalistic and realistic tradition, and conscious of the growing class conflicts in their own country, they resolved to introduce into the thin, pale, bloodless, sentimental, insipid writing of the day, themes, characters and styles which were reflections of American life itself....

“The new trend in American literature made its debut with the publication at the author’s expense of Stephen Crane’s *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* in 1893. Six years later, Frank Norris, a devoted disciple of Emile Zola, laid the plans for his “Epic of Wheat”....

“Crane and Norris were the pioneers of realism in modern American literature, but their writings did not reflect the most important issue confronting the American people in their day—the furious battle between capital and labor....

“But another American writer was emerging who was interested not only in exposing cruelties and oppressions in the economic system, but in remaking it and building a new and better social order. This was Jack London. Like Crane and Norris he was a realist, but unlike them he was also a socialist, and from his belief in Marxism as a philosophy of history he drew the ability to describe, better than any of his predecessors or his contemporaries and most of those who followed him, the modern social struggle out of which would inevitably come the regeneration of mankind...

“London knew of the life of which he wrote; knew how workers lived and talked and how to transfer the details of their lives to the printed page with amazing fidelity. And the workers read this writing, and reread it and passed it along until the pages were shredded...

“February of 1908 saw the book published which brought lasting fame to London’s name the world over, *The Iron Heel*, a rare and prophetic novel...the most revolutionary novel in American literature... With an amazing insight into the mechanism of the capitalist system, London was able to catch tendencies in motion in modern society which went unnoticed by most of his socialist colleagues....

“*The Iron Heel* is the name that London gives to the oligarchy of American capitalists who seized power when there was danger of a socialist victory at the polls....

“The book met with instant derision by the majority of the critics. The *Indianapolis News* was one of the few papers to praise it. ‘Power is certainly the keynote of this book,’ it said. ‘Every word tingles with it; it is so strong that it is almost brutal.... The lift of the book sweeps the reader to his feet; it contains a mighty lesson and a most impressive warning.’ Elsewhere the book was denounced as reckless sensationalism, dishonest, a dull tract masquerading as a novel. *The Dial* declared that ‘such books as this...have a mischievous influence upon unbalanced minds, and we cannot but deplore their multiplication.’ *The Independent* concluded that ‘semi-barbarians, to whom this sort of stuff appeals, may possibly tear down our civilization; they will never lay a single brick of a nobler civilization.’ *The Outlook* summed up the viewpoint of the press with the observation: ‘...as a work of fiction it has little to commend it, and as a socialist tract it is distinctly unconvincing.

“The socialists were divided in their reactions. The more militant leaders like Eugene Debs, Bill Haywood and Mary Marcy praised it unstintingly and urged that its lessons be taken to heart by the entire movement. But the middle class leaders of the Party were even more vehement in their denunciations than the bourgeois critics...” (3-96).

**(1948)** Alex Comfort, *The Novel and Our Time*: “I am assuming without argument that whatever the writer’s conception of art, he writes to interpret something to somebody—in other words, he has a subject and an audience, and his problem is to bring them into contact, by making his own experience comprehensible” (10).

“Because of the involvement of the novel form with the entire structure of Westernism, beside and in which it has developed, its history is the history of a continuous movement to the present point, the point at which the writer is completely divested of any literary disguises, at which his success or failure depends on his power of comprehension as much as on his power of imaginative creation. The period of early industrialism and the rise of socialism coincided closely with the period at which conscious insight into history began to be a prime qualification for the novelist, and the novel itself reached its greatest heights in the hands of those writers who were capable of fulfilling those conditions before they became inescapable.... To see the whole process we need to look at France and Russia, but in English literature alone there is a well-marked turning point in Dickens and Thackeray. Before them, narration, style, humour, and a sense of magnitudes qualify a novel for major achievement; after them, the criterion is an increasingly responsible understanding of social and historical events....

“The responsible writer sees everyone naked, and is as naked himself. He is not devoid of political and moral judgments, but he makes them equally. In reading, therefore, ask: Is this writer capable of recognizing a human being? Is he able to reject the art of diverse weights, for which an act identical in every respect is a heroic but regrettable necessity when done by Our Side and a contemptible atrocity when done by Their Side? Is his judgment of human decisions level or weighted: does he know filth from food, whatever the wrapper? If he does, he is capable of being a great artist under barbarianism, and if not, he is another part of barbarism made manifest” (24-26).

“Writers who publically underrate the temptation of money are certainly not proof against concrete offers in nine cases out of ten, and the collapse of fiction-writers one after another into acquiescence is even more depressing than it would be if state censorship prevented anyone non-acquiesant from being printed openly.... The mechanics of the [corporate publishing] situation make it almost inevitable that is should be the writer’s first book which is the best, the others representing downward degrees of conformity....” (29-30).

“When readers accuse novelists of possessing a bloodshot style, they need to be aware of the vast inflation which has taken place both in the currency and the appreciation of violence. The normal nineteenth-century intensificatories have been inflated out of existence in advertising puffs and in hysterical reportage, and to present normality to a public whose pity is equally choked by custom of fell deeds is a matter of achieving shock-effect” (45) [or so, we might add nearly 60 years later, “hysterical realists,” etc., apparently think].

“We have a tedious mass of books by lunatics who think they are psychologists and by neurotics who think they are lunatics. The literary magazines are full of the praises of schizophrenia” (58).

“Whether we [novelists] are able to influence human conduct will depend very largely upon the number of people in a given asocial society who react by rational aggression towards that society rather than by irrational aggression towards their fellow individuals. The social role of the novel will depend very largely, in coming years, upon the persistence of sufficient rationally disobedient individuals to make novel-writing of the kind I have described possible.

“While interpretation rather than an attempt to convince is the chief object of art, the novel is more apt than any other literary form to exert direct pressure upon the growth and forming of ideas, and it will do so whether we intend that or not.... Because of the essential humanity which a writer must possess to write major novels, I am confident that it will play a large part in the events which precede the end of asociality, and should it pass out of currency as a form, it will be replaced by the unanimous literature of tyranny or the spontaneous social literature of a free society, depending upon how far its readers are able to share and imbibe the responsibility of its best practitioners” (80).

(1949) James Baldwin, “Everybody’s Protest Novel,” *Notes of a Native Son, 1955*: “In *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, that cornerstone of American social protest fiction...speaking for the author...Miss Ophelia and St. Clare are terribly in earnest. Neither of them questions the medieval morality from which their dialogue springs: black, white, the devil, the next world—posing its alternatives between heaven and the flames—were realities for them as, of course, they were for their creator.... Mrs. Stowe’s novel, achieves a bright, almost a lurid significance, like the light from a fire which consumes a witch. This is the more striking as one considers the novels of Negro oppression writers in our own, more enlightened day, all of which say only: ‘This is perfectly horrible! You ought to be ashamed of yourselves!’ (Let us ignore, for the moment, those novels of oppression written by Negroes, which add only a raging, near-paranoiac postscript to this statement

and actually reinforce, as I hope to make clear later, the principles which activate the opposition they decry.)

“*Uncle Tom’s Cabin* is a very bad novel, having, in its self-righteousness, virtuous sentimentality, much in common with *Little Women*. Sentimentality, the ostentatious parading of excessive and spurious emotion, is the mark of dishonesty, the inability to feel; the wet eyes of the sentimentalist betray his aversion to experience, his fear of life, his arid heart; and it is always, therefore, the signal of secret and violent inhumanity, the mask of cruelty; *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*—like its multitudinous, hard-boiled descendants—is a catalogue of violence. This is explained by the nature of Mrs. Stowe’s subject matter, her laudable determination to flinch from nothing in presenting the complete picture; an explanation which falters only if we pause to ask whether or not her picture is indeed complete; and what constriction or failure of perception forced her to so depend on the description of brutality—unmotivated, senseless—and to leave unanswered and unnoticed the only important question: what it was, after all, that moved her people to such deeds.

“But this, let us say, was beyond Mrs. Stowe’s powers; she was not so much a novelist as an impassioned pamphleteer; her book was not intended to do anything more than prove that slavery was wrong; was, in fact, perfectly horrible. This makes material for a pamphlet but it is hardly enough for a novel; and the only question left to ask is why we are bound still within the same constriction. How is it that we are so loath to make a further journey than that made by Mrs. Stowe, to discover and reveal something a little closer to the truth?”

“[...] In *Native Son*, Bigger is Uncle Tom’s descendant, flesh of his flesh, so exactly opposite a portrait that, when the books are placed together, it seems that the contemporary Negro novelist and the dead New England woman are locked together in a deadly, timeless battle; the one uttering merciless exhortations, the other shouting curses.... The failure of the protest novel lies in its rejection of life, the human being, the denial of his beauty, dread, power, in its insistence that it is his categorization alone which is real and which cannot be transcended.”

(1950) Ann Petry, “The Novel as Social Criticism,” *African American Literary Criticism, 1773-2000* (Hazel Arnett Ervin, Ed.): “How should *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, *Germinal*, and *Mary Barton* be classified? As proletarian literature? If *Gentleman’s Agreement* is a problem novel what is *Daniel Deronda*? Jack London may be a proletarian writer but his most famous book *The Call of the Wild* is an adventure story. George Sand has been called one of the founders of the ‘problem’ novel but the bulk of her output dealt with those bourgeois emotions: love and passion. I think one of the difficulties here is the refusal to recognize and admit the fact that not all of the concern about the shortcomings of society originated with Marx. Many a socially conscious novelist is merely a man or woman with a conscience. Though part of the cultural heritage of all of us derives from Marx, whether we subscribe to the Marxist theory or not, a larger portion of it stems from the *Bible*...”

(1953) Gilbert Highet, “The Pleasures of Satire,” *People, Places, Books*: “Satire is just as valuable a type of writing as lyric poetry or fiction; but it is far harder to bring off.... In

order to write satire of any kind, one has to have a number of special talents, and also a special attitude to the public.... The public usually does not believe that anything is deeply wrong with society, and it often thinks that a satirist is a sorehead. It has grown up and found a job and got married and brought up its children in the existing social framework. Why should it believe that the whole thing is tunneled through by gangsters, and bought and sold by crooked politicians, and redesigned to give the biggest profits to the ruthless and the corrupt? No, surely not. Therefore the satirist, who believes these things, usually strains his voice shouting, to making the public hear; and then the public is even less inclined to listen.... They are very amusing and penetrating, these contemporary satires. The only trouble is this: they don't seem to matter much.... This, I regret to say, is the mid-twentieth century. What we need is a satirist bold enough to attack the crooks who run national politics in many countries; the parasites who make vast fortunes by buying something on Monday and selling it on Tuesday, usually to the government; the idealists who ship five million families off to labor camps in order to make their theories come right; the soreheads whose pride was hurt once and who are determined to start a war to take care of the bruise: the rats in the basement, the baboons playing with dynamite. Satire will not kill these animals; but it will make clear the difference between them and human beings, and perhaps inspire a human being to destroy them."

(1955) Joseph L. Blotner, "The Novel as Political Instrument," *The Political Novel*: "In *The Charterhouse of Parma* the witty and urbane Stendhal says, 'Politics in a work of literature are like a pistol-shot in the middle of a concert, something loud and vulgar yet a thing to which it is not possible to refuse one's attention.' His own work contradicts the great French novelist, yet his comment is perfectly accurate for many other novelists. Politics in some modern novels of political corruption, such as Charles F. Coe's *Ashes*, do seem loud and vulgar, and in books like Upton Sinclair's the reader may hear not one pistol shot but a cannonade. But this is not to say that the use of political material must disrupt a work of literature. The trick, of course, is all in knowing how. Harriet Beecher Stowe wrote an artistically weak, politically successful work in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, while Fyodor Dostoyevsky produced a politically unsuccessful, artistically enduring classic in *The Possessed*" (3).

"A political novel written from a point of view favoring a particular faction is a political instrument in effect even if not in intent. A writer may sternly tell himself at the outset that he will be completely impartial, only to have reviewers note all sorts of bias, real or imagined, of which he may not have been conscious. This happened to Turgenev when he published *Fathers and Sons*, and it continues to happen every year. The intensity of the authors' feelings varies from obsessive preoccupation to passing interest. The novels in this chapter were included because they contain definite opinions, sometimes appeals, on political subjects. Some of them never exhort the reader or seem to lead him by the hand to the author's point of view. But each of them contains material capable of influencing the reader's opinions about some phase of political activity. If a novelist gains a reader's support for a cause, arouses his distaste for a course of action, or simply produces a reevaluation of previously accepted beliefs, his work has served as a political instrument

just as surely as a pamphlet mailed by a national committee or a handbill stuffed into the mailboxes of a sleeping city” (10).

(1955) Ralph Ellison, “The Art of Fiction: An Interview,” *Collected Essays* (2003); *Shadow and Act*, 1964: “I recognize no dichotomy between art and protest. Dostoevsky’s *Notes from the Underground* is, among other things, a protest against the limitations of nineteenth-century rationalism; *Don Quixote*, *Man’s Fate*, *Oedipus Rex*, *The Trial*—all these embody protest, even against the limitation of human life itself. If social protest is antithetical to art, what then shall we make of Goya, Dickens and Twain? One hears a lot of complaints about the so-called ‘protest novel,’ especially when written by Negroes, but it seems to me that the critics could more accurately complain about their lack of craftsmanship and the provincialism.”

(1956) Walter B. Rideout, *The Radical Novel in the United States—1900-1954*: “Taken in its entirety, then, a half-century of the radical novel has had its effect on and made a contribution to American literature. It has also affected and contributed to American life, not just uniquely, however, but as part of the whole larger course of the novel of social protest, that tradition which has proliferated so variously in the troubled twentieth century and which extends back into the nineteenth through the early Hamlin Garland and the Utopians, through Mark Twain, in some of his moods, back to, and well before, Harriet Beecher Stowe, whose *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* did as much to change the face of the nation as, perhaps, all the proletarian novels put together. This tradition, which is certainly a great, though not the only one, the radical novel of the present century has helped to continue. Despite their orientation toward Marxism, the Socialist, the proletarian, the independently radical novelists have not been able to obscure the fact that in essential ways they represented yet another manifestation of the American middle-class conscience, which has been the major force behind the literature of social criticism from Harriet Stowe down even to the present day. Viewed as part of a developing process, the radical novel shares in the value of the whole, the value of protest against the still limited democracy that is an affirmation of the democracy that can be. For protest is valuable, quite as valuable as that acceptance without which no continuing social organization is possible. Whether wrong-headed or right, protest will always be essential in order to stir our civilization into self-awareness and thus prevent it from stiffening into an inhuman immobility. In the frequently unwise thirties this rather elementary final statement would have been assumed. That it must now be asserted indicates that the fifties have their own particular lack of wisdom...”

In the 1992 introduction, Rideout notes: “Rereading *The Radical Novel in the United States* for the first time in decades...it struck me as a reasonably good book...though I did wonder how I could have had the patience to get through so many awful novels in order to reach the fewer worthwhile ones.... In a few reviews, two linked objections emerged...: first, that I had too rigidly limited my subject by defining a radical novel as ‘one which demonstrates, either explicitly or implicitly, that the author objects to the human suffering imposed by some socioeconomic system and *advocates that the system be fundamentally changed.*’ Granted this definition required me to discuss many bad novels and not to discuss certain better ones; but even bad novels can be illustrative, and

it seemed, and still seems, to me that such a sociopolitical definition enabled me to treat in some depth a specifically sociopolitical genre of fiction aimed at fundamental change rather than at reform which would improve the system but not change it basically. Better a limiting definition, I would argue, than one which might turn out to be imprecise and overinclusive.”

“My point may be clearer if I move to a second objection, a corollary of the first, that I should have written about the much more extensive fiction of ‘social protest.’ Suppose I had written or tried to write the kind of book these reviewers had wanted me to instead of the one I did. Quite aside from the probability that the ratio of bad to good social protest novels would be about the same as bad to good radical ones, I would have been faced with two problems: how should ‘the fiction of social protest’ be defined, and how could I, or anyone, hope to cover thoroughly in a single volume a very large and disunified field? For really, in American fiction just of the first half of the twentieth century there were many different kinds of social protest going on.... ”

**(1957) Irving Howe, *Politics and the Novel*:** “This book is meant primarily as a study of the relations between literature and ideas, though a considerable part of it, I should say, consists of literary criticism. My interest was far less in literature as social evidence or testimony than in the literary problem of what happens to the novel when it is subjected to the pressures of politics and political ideology. In discussing nineteenth century writers I have employed more or less conventional methods of criticism, while in treating twentieth century writers I have found myself placing a greater stress upon politics and ideology as such; but this was not the result of any preconceived decision, it was a gradual shift in approach that seemed to be required by the nature of the novels themselves” (11).

“The greatest of all political novels, *The Possessed*, was written with the explicit purpose of excommunicating all beliefs that find salvation anywhere but in the Christian God. ‘I mean to utter certain thoughts,’ wrote Dostoevsky, ‘whether all the artistic side of it goes to the dogs or not...even if it turns into a mere pamphlet, I shall say all that I have in my heart.’ Fortunately Dostoevsky could not suppress his ‘artistic side’ and by the time his book reaches its end it has journeyed through places of the head and heart undreamed of in his original plan. But whatever else it does, *The Possessed* proves nothing of the kind that might be accessible to proof in ‘a mere pamphlet.’ For while a political novel can enrich our sense of human experience, while it can complicate and humanize our commitments, it is only very rarely that it will alter those commitments themselves. And when it does so, the political novel is engaged in a task of persuasion which is not really its central or distinctive purpose. I find it hard to imagine, say, a serious socialist being dissuaded from his belief by a reading of *The Possessed*, though I should like equally to think that the quality and nuance of that belief can never be quite as they were before he read *The Possessed*.

“Because it exposes the impersonal claims of ideology to the pressures of private emotion, the political novel must always be in a state of internal warfare, always on the verge of becoming something other than itself. The political novelist—the degree to which he is aware of this is another problem—establishes a complex system of

intellectual movements, in which his own opinion is one of the most active yet not entirely dominating movers. Are we not close here to one of the ‘secrets’ of the novel in general?—I mean the vast respect which the great novelist is ready to offer to the whole idea of opposition, the opposition he needs to allow for in his book against his own predispositions and yearnings and fantasies. He knows that his own momentum, his own intentions, can be set loose easily enough; but he senses, as well, that what matters most of all is to allow for those rocks against which his intentions may smash but, if he is lucky, they may merely bruise. Even as the great writer proudly affirms the autonomy of his imagination, even as he makes the most severe claims for his power of imposing his will upon the unformed materials his imagination has brought up to him, he yet acknowledges that he must pit himself against the imperious presence of the necessary. And in the political novel it is politics above all, politics as both temptation and impediment, that represents the necessary.”

“[...] The criteria for evaluation of a political novel must finally be the same as those for any other novel: how much of our life does it illuminate? how ample a moral vision does it suggest?—but these questions occur to us in a special context, in that atmosphere of political struggle which dominates modern life. For both the writer and the reader, the political novel provides a particularly severe test: politics rakes our passions as nothing else, and whatever we may consent to overlook in reading a novel, we react with an almost demonic rapidity to a detested political opinion. For the writer the great test is, how much truth can he force through the sieve of his opinions? For the reader the great test is, how much of that truth can he accept though it jostle *his* opinions?” (22-24).

**(1957) Wimsatt and Brooks, *Literary Criticism: A Short History*:** “In Czarist Russia of the mid-19<sup>th</sup>-century, a didactic theory of literature was strongly invited not only by political and social conditions but by the actual pre-eminence of a generation of socially conscious novelists.... The greatest Russian literary figure to participate in the 19<sup>th</sup>-century complex of socio-realistic theory and the writer whose pronouncements on art have impinged with most authority on the English literary mind, was undoubtedly Tolstoy—‘the conscience of Russia’ in his time, ‘the conscience of the world’ ‘the conscience of humanity’.... He was in his middle age a violent convert to a kind of Christian thinking. A period of furious tractarian activity followed the production of the great novels. And it is a religious theory of literature that near the end of his life issues in his thunderously deliberate denunciation of all that he himself and all that European artists for 300 years had created.... The destruction of the idea ‘art for art’s sake’ and the reconstruction of art as a monitor and propagandist for the social process is the gist of Tolstoy’s preachment, and this has been also the monotonous burden of subsequent Marxist criticism in Russia and the instructed echoes of this in English and American writing which sounded in the later 1920’s and the 1930’s... In America the idea of a socially activist literature appears during the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with the ‘muckraking’ movement (of which Upton Sinclair’s *Mammonart*, 1924, may stand as the sufficient symbol) and after that in the overtly Marxist criticism of the later twenties and the thirties—the work of such writers as Michael Gold, editor of the *New Masses*, Joseph Freeman, editor of the anthology *Proletarian Literature in the United States*, 1935, and V.F. Calverton, editor of the *Modern Quarterly*....” [Ignored here, among others, W.E.B. DuBois, editor of *Crisis*]

“A major monument was Vernon Louis Parrington’s three-volume *Main Currents in American Thought* (1927-1930)... Marxism and the forms of social criticism more closely related to it [V.L. Parrington, et. al.] have never had any real concern with literature and literary problems. In this country the cause enlisted some keen journalistic and literary minds. But a number of them, like Max Eastman as editor of *The Masses*, avoided sociology in their literary criticism. Eastman shied away from doctrinal and scientific claims for literature and worked up a theory of vivid sensory realization that belongs rather in the tradition of art for art’s sake. Edmund Wilson in *Axel’s Castle*, 1931, made gestures acknowledging the social responsibility of the artist but only as if in atonement for his having dwelt at such length among the mysteries of symbolism. As early as the anthology acclaiming Proletarian Literature in 1935, the editors of the *Partisan Review* were observing a flow of ‘gush’ and ‘invective,’ in place of analysis, and the exercise of Marxism as a ‘sentiment’ rather than a ‘science.’ James T. Farrell’s *A Note on Literary Criticism*, 1936, is a critique by an ‘amateur Marxist’ of the party-line simplifications. By 1939 it was possible for the *Partisan* editor Philip Rahv to write an essay under the title ‘Proletarian Literature: A Political Autopsy.’ Marxist naturalism persists in American letters today less as a proclaimed cause than as a deeply rooted sympathy (A Gnostic utopianism) ready with each shift in political or literary dialectics to exert itself in a new stratagem” (460-471).

(1958) **Maxwell Geismar, *American Moderns—From Rebellion to Conformity***: “The present volume began as a collection of articles and reviews writing in the Nineteen-Forties and Fifties for a more or less popular audience... Some of these articles are in the polemical vein which a critic uses with reluctance when his second nature, or his first, is to inquire, to balance, and to evaluate. The central focus of the volume is on the transitional decade from the Second World War to the middle of the twentieth century—from McCarthy to Sputnik. The historical setting is that of the uneasy ‘peace,’ the tensions of the Cold War, the return to ‘normalcy,’ and the epoch of conformity.

“Or was it euphoria? In literature the period marked the decline of the classic modern American writers at the peak of their popular reputation. In criticism there was the movement towards higher and higher levels of aesthetic, or scholastic, absolutes....

“There was indeed a state of general inertia in the arts, as the familiar sequel to an age of anxiety: of problems urgent and not resolved, while the surface of the globe, and outer space too, vibrated in the throes of change. The American literary scene of the Forties and Fifties must have presented to the rest of the world an odd and ironic spectacle at times; and perhaps the polemical note was indicated; and meanwhile I trust that this spectacle may also be instructive... (ix-x).

“[An] emotional syndrome of fear, terror, obsessional hatred, and perhaps underground attraction, of which [John] Dos Passos is the clearest example, has colored and conditioned our whole intellectual climate during the last decade.

“It accounts for our strange concentration of anxiety on the one ritualistic theme of anticommunism, by which every other issue has come to be measured. Thus our crucial domestic battles have been fought out on the popular level, while our intellectual journals have hardly dared to mention them. Our best literary work has come from writers who are outside this intellectual orbit, where panic has slowly subsided into inertia. One notices

that Dos Passos himself, settled in the shadow of Monticello, has lost just those attributes of the old republic which made a whole line of country squires—from Jefferson to Franklin Roosevelt—such a potent force in our social revolution.

“Dos Passos, indeed, has become a frightened landlord, guarding his ancestral estate. And as I write these lines, another old-fashioned Southern agrarian, William Faulkner, has just declared that in the final crisis he will have to stand by Mississippi, and shoot down the Negroes in the streets. Well, good-bye to all that” (83).

“[William] Faulkner had humor, often ironic and bitter, in the series of dramas and tragedies he wrote about the Old South. But the meaning of his humor about the New South, personified in the Snopes clan of *The Hamlet* (1940) is a very different matter.

“Those who are surprised at the recent statements on integration which have come from the Nobel Prize Moralists—America’s literary spokesman before the world—might do well to look at Faulkner’s novels. Not at the rational and moral statements in them, either, but at their prevailing imagery and true dramatic action. The critics who have been celebrating this artist as the foremost symbol of the progressive, modern, ‘civilized’ South have not understood the real psychological forces in his work. Faulkner is, or was, a major artist simply because he revealed the darkest recesses of the Southern psyche: the folds and flaps of fear, ignorance, and prejudice.

“But he is a writer who is more than half infatuated with, or strangled by, the psychic demons he has conjured up. Never mind the rhetoric on state occasions. He too belongs with the class of Southern men whom Ellen Glasgow described as having learned to talk and to preach before they learned to think...

“The Southern scene does offer great dramatic possibilities for a writer today, and Faulkner is in a unique position to render a true service to his culture, his tradition, and his art. But this writer is not serious any more. The ‘humor’ of the Snopes chronicle is a hasty gag rather than genuine social satire. It almost seems that the artist’s contempt for all phases of modern life, which was clear as early as *The Sound and the Fury*, has prevented him from learning the truth about the modern South.

“Why else should two out of three books produced after the Nobel Prize (with its much-publicized nobility of artistic aspiration) strike us as not only poor, but trivial or cheap? (While the third book, *The Fable*, is at best mediocre.) This is the real tragedy for Faulkner, for the South, for American letters; and the mass of indiscriminating adulation given to this author recently has been no real help...

“So be it; and perhaps it is this dark and recessive fear, rooted in the phobic depths of Faulkner’s own fancy, which has led him to his present position on the racial question. Is Faulkner himself now living among the phantoms that his own dark and fertile imagination has, in the past, conjured up so magnificently? But in the plain light of day, what nonsense it all is!” (101-106).

“*East of Eden* is a tricky and meaningless parable—on the conscious level—of man’s ‘fall’ through woman’s vice. On the unconscious level—in this case, unconscious to the author—we may feel beneath the novel’s sentimentality, and even below the humanitarian principles which are the remaining link with the best period of [John] Steinbeck’s work, a certain malice and hostility toward human life itself. The good writers often acknowledge this in their own literary vision, and build upon it. The lesser

one write romances which both reveal and deny it, and sometimes it comes to dominate or destroy their spirit” (166-167).

“Like his closest literary forebear, Dos Passos, [Norman] Mailer has no confidence in human nature itself, and perhaps no mature experience with it. The social values in [Mailer’s third] novel, too, if they are intelligent, decent, liberal, are based on a biological void.

“How tragic it is to be without illusions, even if they exist, in a writer’s craft, only to be dispelled. That is probably Norman Mailer’s central flaw, his central need; and meanwhile curious undertones of juvenile malice also appear in his work. He may be the latest type of Bad Boy in our national letters, whose problem is to grow up” (178-179).

“In a desperate spiritual revulsion against a devouring infantile egoism, is the answer really to repudiate our whole notion of Western individuality? Is there really no such thing (as Zooey tells Franny) as time or change or growth in our concept of human personality? In the Zen quest for ‘No-Knowledge’ (as Buddy Glass tells his split-half Zooey), is it true that all legitimate religious study must lead to unlearning ‘the illusory differences between boys and girls, animals and stones, day and night, heat and cold?’...a negation of the ‘mind’...in favor of the pure and primary world of childhood sensation. That lost world of childhood indeed to which somehow or other, [J.D.] Salinger, like the rest of the *New Yorker* school, always returns! That pre-Edenite community of yearned-for bliss, where knowledge is again the serpent of all evil: but a false and precocious show of knowledge, to be sure, which elevated without emancipating its innocent and often touching little victims... The root of the matter is surely here, and perhaps all these wise children may yet emerge from the nursery of life and art” (208-209).

“The suffering, the humility, the moral goodness in [Saul Bellow’s] books, the honest and ironic realization of human weakness: these are the traits that appeal to us. But this note of resignation, of acceptance, does not appear in Bellow’s work after the violence and passions of life, as it commonly does in the work of major artists. It appears in Bellow’s fiction *instead of* the emotional storm and stress it should transcend. The central image of the hero in his novels and stories is not indeed that of the rebellious son, but of the suffering, the tormented, and the conforming son.

“To use the phraseology of Salinger, this hero is the good boy, the sad sack; or to use the term of depth psychology, he is the castrated son” (221).

**(1958) George Steiner, “Marxism and the Literary Critic,” *Language and Silence* (1967):** “There is the intricate, yet ultimately persuasive, distinction which Marxist theory draws between ‘realism’ and ‘naturalism.’ It goes back to Hegel’s reflections on the Iliad and the Odyssey. Hegel found that in the Homeric epics the depiction of physical objects, however detailed and stylized, did not intrude upon the rhythm and vitality of the poem. Descriptive writing in modern literature, on the other hand, struck him as contingent and lifeless.... Compared to Homeric or even to medieval times, modern man inhabits the physical world like a rapacious stranger. These ideas greatly influenced Marx and Engels. It contributed to their own theory of the ‘alienation’ of the individual under capitalist modes of production. In the course of their debate with

Lassalle and of their study of Balzac, Marx and Engels came to believe that this problem of estrangement was directly germane to the problem of realism in art. The poets of antiquity and the 'classical realists' (Cervantes, Shakespeare, Goethe, Balzac) had achieved an organic relationship between objective reality and the life of the imagination. The 'naturalist,' on the other hand, looks on the world as on a warehouse of whose contents he must make a feverish inventory. 'A sense of reality,' says a contemporary Marxist critic, 'is created not by a reproduction of all the features of an object but by a depiction of those features that form the essence...while in naturalistic art—because of a striving to achieve an elusive fullness—the image, also incomplete, places both the *essential* and the *secondary*, the unimportant, on the same plane.' This distinction is far reaching. It bears on the decline of French realism after Balzac and Stendhal, and tells us something of Zola's obsessive attempt to make of the novel an index of the world. By virtue of it, we may discriminate between the 'realism' of Chekhov and the 'naturalism' of, say, Maupassant. Through it, also, we may ascertain that *Madame Bovary*, for all its virtues, is a slighter thing than *Anna Karenina*. In naturalism there is accumulation; in realism what Henry James called the 'deep-breathing economy' of organic form..." (321-322).

"At the origins of the Marxist theory of literature there are three celebrated and canonic texts. Two of them are citations from Engels' letters [to Kautsky and Harkness]; the third is contained in a short essay by Lenin ["Party Organization and Party Literature"].... Engels is not objecting to a *littérature engagée* as such but rather to the mixture 'of mere empiricism and empty subjectivity' in the bourgeois novel of the period. Obviously dissatisfied with this treatment of the problem, Lukács reverted to it in 1945, in his 'Introduction to the Writings on Aesthetics of Marx and Engels.' Here he contends that Engels was distinguishing between two forms of *littérature à thèse* (it is significant that the English language and its critical vocabulary have developed no precisely equivalent expression). All great literature, in Lukács' reading, has a 'fundamental bias.' A writer can only achieve a mature and responsible portrayal of life if he is committed to progress and opposed to reaction, if he 'loves the good and rejects the bad.' When a critic of Lukács' subtlety and rigor descends to such banalities—banalities which directly challenge his own works on Goethe, Balzac, and Tolstoy—we know that something is amiss. The attempt to reconcile the image of literature implicit in Lenin's essay with that put forward by Engels is a rather desperate response to the pressures of orthodoxy and to the Stalinist demand for total internal coherence in Marxist doctrine. Even the most delicate exegesis cannot conceal the plain fact that Engels and Lenin were saying different things, that they were pointing toward contrasting ideals" (305-307).

"Marxist-Leninism and the political régimes enacted in its name take literature *seriously*, indeed desperately so. At the very height of the Soviet revolution's battle for physical survival, Trotsky found occasion to assert that 'the development of art is the highest test of the vitality and significance of each epoch.' Stalin himself deemed it essential to add to his voluminous strategic and economic pronouncements a treatise on philology and the problems of language in literature. In a Communist society the poet is regarded as a figure central to the health of the body politic. Such regard is cruelly manifest in the very urgency with which the heretical artist is silenced or hounded to destruction. To shoot a

man because one disagrees with his interpretation of Darwin or Hegel is a sinister tribute to the supremacy of ideas in human affairs—but a tribute nevertheless” (323).

(1962) Edwin Muir, *The Estate of Poetry*: “I’ve been trying to measure the gap between the public and the poet, and to find some explanation why it is so great. I began with the time when there was neither poet nor public, when the anonymous song or ballad was transmitted from generation to generation by the peasantry, and poetry was a possession so common that poet and audience were lost in it; we have been irreversibly changed. At best we can gain from that or oral poetry that beauty which is in it, and the knowledge that poetry is not a thing reserved for a few, since it was once, and for a long time, treasured and fostered by so many. If, knowing this, we could be brought to modify our contemporary notion of poetry as a rarified and special and often difficult thing, it might have a salutary effect on our criticism and our practice of poetry as well...” (94).

“There is a greater poetry than that of the ballads; they [ballads] do not contain those universal statements of life which we find in Dante and Shakespeare; but they were once a general possession as Shakespeare has never been. And that great poetry can, or once could, be a general possession is a fact which we should not forget: those of us who write poetry, and those of us who criticize it. If we could keep it in mind, I think it would give us a more just and adequate idea of poetry...” (22).

“[A reporter] also quoted Mr. [T. S.] Eliot as saying that ‘criticism of poetry began and ended in enjoyment,’ which I think is the traditional practice. But the observation that is most illuminating in this report is that ‘a genuine poem may arouse a very great number of differing responses, yet there will be always something in common between them,’ and that this is what poetry is for. There have been some very strange responses to poems, as Mr. Richards has shown so convincingly in his book, *Practical Criticism*, responses which seemed plainly to contradict one another. Yet, even allowing for this, there will be something in common between people’s varied responses to a poem, and the poem exists for that purpose. If we believe this, poetry takes on a wider significance than it is currently allowed, and lets in the ordinary unanalytical reader, and with him human nature. People will read poetry for enjoyment, since that is what it is intended for; and they will not, except in a few exceptional cases, take it up as a strict methodical study. And it may be said that they will get more help, both in enjoyment and understanding, from the traditional critic who tells them what the poem means to him, than from the new one who warns them that it cannot possibly mean what it appears to mean, so that he has no choice left but to explain it. The divorce between the public audience and the poet is widened by this critical method; or perhaps one should rather say that the method legalizes the divorce as a settled and normal state. And that is what we feel to be wrong...” (76-77).

“The first allegiance of any poet is to imaginative truth...but it does not mean that he should turn inward into the complex problems of poetry, or be concerned with poetry as a problem. That is something which has commonly happened in the last fifty years. There was some excuse for it after the years of experiment associated with Mr. Eliot and Mr. Pound. To them, about 1910, poetry seemed to have come to a dead end, and intense

thought had to be given to it. The experiments of that time and the succeeding years have become a part of literary history. As they were new and strange when they were first attempted, they were found difficult by the reader; and they seem to have left for a time in the minds of poets and critics the belief that poetry should be difficult. The experimenters have done their work, and we should be thankful to them. There have been many experimenters in English poetry: Chaucer was one; and Spenser, Milton, Dryden, and Wordsworth were all experimenters. The experimenters of forty years ago did something to poetry and something for poetry. One kind of poetry was written before T.S. Eliot, and another kind after him. But the point of an experiment is that it should solve the particular problem set for it. This was done in the twenties.... There remains the temptation for poets to turn inward into poetry, to lock themselves in to a hygienic prison where they speak only to one another, and to the critic, their stern warder. In the end a poet must create his audience, and to do that he must turn outward. Even if he is conscious of having no audience, he must imagine one. That may be the way to conjure it out of the public void. Yeats, who had to wait for it long, declared that you must have an audience, and that he could not write without one. Anyone reading his poetry must feel that the audience was an imaginary one long before it became real. To imagine an audience, one must hold up before himself the variety of human life, for from that diversity the audience will be drawn. The poet need not think of the public—its vastness and impersonality would daunt anyone; he should reflect instead that in no other age than ours—I mean the last hundred years or so—has a poet had to deal with it. He has to see past it, or through it, to the men and women, with their individual lives, who in some strange way and without their choice are part of it, and yet are hidden by it (108-110).

(1963) Vernon Hall, Jr., *A Short History of Literary Criticism*: “That Karl Marx could not have envisioned the extremes to which the Soviet totalitarians would put his literary theories is obvious. We know, for instance, that his colleague Frederick Engels wrote the following in a letter to an early ‘proletarian’ novelist who asked for Engel’s help in popularizing his novel: ‘Look at your heroine, with her dialectical materialist eyes and her economic determinist nose and her surplus value mouth. *You* take her in your arms and *you* kiss her. I know I wouldn’t want to’” (145).

(1963) Robert E. Spiller, Ed. et. al., *Literary History of the United States*: “When President Lincoln greeted Harriet Beecher Stowe with the words, ‘So you’re the little woman who made the book that made this great war,’ he was speaking as a political realist who had learned by experience to respect the power of the pen. It was not for him to refer slightly to ‘mere literature.’ Without *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, in the opinion of Sumner, there would have been no Lincoln in the White House.

“But the historian must avoid hyperbole. In spite of the enormous vogue of Mrs. Stowe’s novel, it is doubtful if a book had much power to change the course of events. More persuasive than her tender pleadings was the harsh propaganda carried on by Abolitionists for over thirty years. And mightiest of all was the trend of liberal opinion through the nineteenth century, which was bound to sweep out of existence even the most beneficent and patriarchal of feudal survivals. In the last analysis slavery was abolished because men could no longer endure the thought of it. Shrewd common people were the first to sense how the tide was turning” (563).

(1964) Michael Millgate, *American Social Fiction*: “American writers have repeatedly been worried, confused, or angered—rarely amused—by the irreconcilability of American ideals and American experience, and one result of this sense of the gulf between the way things should be and the way things are, has been a readiness to regard the novel as a political instrument. English reform movements have tended to be dominated by intellectuals, whose preferred media have been the essay and, occasionally, the problem play. In seeking to achieve radical alterations in society, they have not directly sought mass support; in fact, much of their attention has been directed to the problem of restraining popular unrest and of guiding it into the most profitable channels. ...the novels of Ignatius Donnelly, Edward Bellamy, William Dean Howells and many others were the often unsubtle but nonetheless powerful advocates of a wide variety of political doctrines and Utopian dreams. At the end of the nineteenth century, writers such as Gustavus Myers, Jacob Riis, and Lincoln Steffens showed that straight reporting might in certain circumstances be more effective than fiction, but Jack London and Upton Sinclair, more doctrinaire in their approach to social problems, continued to preach socialism through the medium of the novel—presumably because it was wider in its circulation, simpler in its appeal, and less hampered by the discipline of observable fact.

“In addition to these narrowly political writers there have been the many novelists of social protest. Early in the century there were the ‘muckrakers,’ such as Winston Churchill, William Allen White, Robert Herrick, and Ernest Poole; later came Anderson, Dos Passos, Steinbeck, the ‘proletarians,’ and Norman Mailer. For all the differences between them, such novelists of social protest have at least one thing in common: They approach society not in a responsive or sensitive way but with their minds already made up; they come armed not only with their talents but with a theory. It is of the essence of the novelist’s job that he should impose a pattern upon his material, but these novelists impose a pattern not of art but, in the broadest sense, of politics. “[...] It can be argued that the delineation of society as such is a dubious undertaking for any artist. Again and again the material takes charge, as it does in Dreiser; or the political intention takes charge, as in so many of the novelists of social protest; or there is a tendency for the social material, the ‘information,’ to become separated out from the ostensible action of the novel.... The proper function of social description in a novel must be to define and illuminate the human predicament. This is something which English novelists seem almost automatically to have accepted. Many American novelists have not accepted it, and they have often squandered their powers as a result” (196-200).

“In the last analysis, what we ask of the social novelist is not so much that he should reflect our view of society, but that he should make us see society his way” (205) and that such novelists “look beyond [the national experience] to the universal human experience of which it is inevitably a part” (212). “In admiring the novels of George Eliot, we need to remember that what seems to us the accuracy of her social observation is in some degree an indication of her greatness as a novelist, of her power to make us accept the image of society she presents. It matters little whether or not William Faulkner’s novels give an ‘accurate’ picture of the South; what matters supremely is that Faulkner presents his South, the world of Yoknapatawpha County, solidly and vividly, both as a setting and as a conditioning environment...” (205).

(1965) Eudora Welty, “Must the Novelist Crusade,” in *The Eye of the Story* (1978): “It can be said at once, I should think, that we are all agreed upon the most important point: that morality as shown through human relationships is the whole heart of fiction, and the serious writer has never lived who dealt with anything else. And yet, the zeal to reform, which quite properly inspires the editorial, has never done fiction much good. The exception occurs when it can rise to the intensity of satire, where it finds a better home in the poem or the drama.”

(1969) Maxwell Geismar, “Introduction,” *New Masses: An Anthology of the Rebel Thirties* (Ed. Joseph North): “I welcome this anthology for several reasons, but mainly because it is part of something which I have begun to think of as our ‘buried history’ in the Cold War period. Recently a group of American historians have been digging into, one might say, ‘excavating,’ the true facts of this Cold War Culture – the curious period from the mid-forties to the mid-sixties – and the results are very interesting. We have had almost a quarter of a century of conformity, comfort, complacency and mediocrity in American literature – this epoch of ‘instant masterpieces’ – and only now can we begin to put the pieces together and find a consistent pattern...” (1).

“...it was the Cold War that brought about the downfall, in 1949, of one of the most brilliant journalistic enterprises in our literary history. At the war’s end, a new epoch of repression was about to start. Another great achievement of the Depression years was the WPA Federal Theater Project; and Halle Flanagan’s history of this, in her book *Arena*, ends with the congressional investigation and foreclosure of the Federal Theater by political figures who are, by Divine Grace or special dispensation, still active in Washington today... What was the real truth, the true historical dimension, of the Cold War? As I said in opening this Introduction, a new group of Cold War historians have been giving us a whole new set of impressions, which, alas, most of those who lived through the period, and are so certain of their convictions, will not even bother to read and to think about.

“For if they did...the Schlesingers, the Galbraiths, the Kristols, the Max Lerner, the Trillings, the Bells, the Rahvs, the Kazins, the Irving Howes: all these outstanding, upstanding figures of our political-cultural scene today...they would have to admit both their own illusions for the last twenty years, and the fact that they have deliberately deluded their readers about the historical facts of our period. Since it was they who fastened the Cold War noose around all our necks, how can we expect them to remove it? – even though, as in the cases of Mary McCarthy and Dwight MacDonal, and the estimable *New York Review of Books*, they have bowed a little to the changing winds of fashion today. Due to student protests at base, and student confrontations on Cold War issues, Professors Bell and Trilling have indeed moved on from Columbia to Harvard University – but after Harvard what?

“Mr. Trilling has even ‘resigned’ from contemporary literature, saying at long last that he does not understand it – but only after he led the attack for twenty years on such figures as the historian Vernon Parrington, the novelist Dreiser, the short-story writer Sherwood Anderson, and other such figures of our literary history. And only after the Columbia University English Department had taken the lead in setting up Henry James as

‘Receiver’ in what amounted to the bankruptcy of our national literature. The Cold War Liberals, historians, critics and so-called sociologists, also clustered around a set of prestigious literary magazines like *Partisan Review*, *The New Leader*, *Encounter* of London, *Der Monat* of Berlin, which had in effect set the tone and the values of the ‘Free World’ culture. When it was revealed, about two years ago, that these leading cultural publications and organizations (the various Congresses and Committees for ‘Cultural Freedom’), as well as some student organizations and big unions of the AFL-CIO, were in fact being financed and controlled by Central Intelligence Agency – the game was up...” (10-12).

(1977) Maxwell Geismar, *Reluctant Radical: A Memoir* [first published 2002]: “One of my later discoveries of my radicalized self was how many of our liberal friends, how many people in general, including particularly the typical American male, have remained perpetual adolescents....

“The desires and dreams of adolescence die hard, if they ever do. We still yearn for the peace and security of childhood when nothing was certain, when the promise of the future, however vague, still sparkled before us, when we could cherish the illusion of enduring and uncritical happiness and comfort—within the protective womb of family and society.

“In my view, however, the great artists are those who have gone beyond the confining web or cocoon of their past, who have been able to look through their world and really understand it. This is perhaps the acid test of maturity: to outlive, to go beyond those entangling bonds of youth and accepted status. Then only do we become ourselves and know who we are; then only do we confirm our judgments by our own inner authority rather than by tribal law or custom.

“And yet...and yet how difficult such a moral position is to maintain, so lofty and isolated and comfortless at times, sustained only by the great individuals of history and even then at some cost usually to their humanness. This is one reason that the radicals whom we met later in life clung to each other for support in their common exile. This is why they knew each other and why they joined together—despite their often bitter ideological conflicts—to support one another in an American society they all opposed.

“So it was that at the most rewarding peaks of our new life in the sixties and seventies, I had, on my bad days, recurring fits of self-doubt and remorse and regret. The truth is, I missed the comforting and reassuring perks of power and place, not to mention the cash, of my former career—or the attention I had received as a promising star on the American literary scene. I enjoyed the attention and consideration I received from authors and publishers alike as a featured reviewer in the mass media and in the academic journals. On those low days of mine, when I thought about the money I might have made as a popular writer rather than a radical one, I’d ask myself: Would I have done this, given up all this, if I had known what I was in for? Would I do it all over again, knowing the consequences?

“I recalled the veiled threats I had received from various members of the literary establishment after the publication of the James book, threats which at the time I had dismissed so lightly. There were warnings, too, by younger friends in academia that they, the accepted pundits, were out to get me, and I should be careful! Well, I had been careful, in my own view. I published a highly praised, carefully wrought volume on Mark

Twain positing Twain as the polar opposite of Henry James. And the Twain scholars were even more incensed by my Twain book than the Jamesians were by my James study! What I had done by critical feel, by my deepest personal instinct and judgment in literary affairs, they now attributed to my desire, after the Henry James book, to expand a notorious career! I, who had the worst fears of notoriety all my life, who had craved honorable respectability, who had avoided the obvious dodges of creating a name, who had always shunned sensationalism.

“It was ironic at least...”

(1978) John Colmer, “The Writer as Critic of Society,” *Coleridge to Catch-22: Images of Society*: “A study of the writer as a critic of society that ends with science-fiction fantasies and anti-war novels such as *A Clockwork Orange*, *Fahrenheit 451*, *Slaughterhouse 5* and *Catch-22* had better acquire what academic respectability it can by starting with the ancient Greeks, with Plato in fact. In Plato’s *Republic*, that early blueprint for a benevolent dictatorship and first example of Utopian fantasy, no place can be found for the imaginative writer. In justification Plato gives three reasons. The poet, he argues, deals with reality at two removes. He tells lies about the gods and heroes, a complaint that is not difficult to translate into terms that would be applicable to any modern dictatorship. And he appeals to emotions, when he should appeal to man’s noblest faculty, the reason. ‘We shall,’ says Plato ‘bow down before a being with such miraculous powers of giving pleasure; but we shall tell him that we are not allowed to have any such person in our commonwealth; we shall crown him with fillets of wool, anoint his head with myrrh, and conduct him to another country’ (*Republic*, Book 10). Regretfully, because Plato is certainly not unaware of the sublime powers possessed by the inspired poet, but firmly and magisterially, this stern moral puritan dismisses the poet from his ideal state. Here, then, in Plato’s *Republic*, we have the first memorable statement of the clash between two ideals of order: the inspired order of the artist and the imposed order of the state, an opposition that permeates Romantic and post-Romantic literature. And in exiling the artist from his ideal state, Plato is the first to create for him that very modern role, the Outsider....

“The successful critic of society, it may be suggested, is the writer who learns the wisdom of indirection. He is the writer who learns to combine instruction with delight, without in any way compromising his integrity of blunting the force of his social criticism. Some literary forms are especially suited to methods of indirect attack: satire, for example. From the time of the Greeks onwards, satirists have invented a variety of ways to maintain apparent detachment and the indirect approach, while pressing home their attack. The three commonest forms are the beast fable, the imaginary journey, and the Utopian fantasy. The beast fable has been used by the Greek dramatist Aristophanes in the *Frogs*, by Chaucer in the *Nun’s Priest’s Tale*, and by George Orwell in *Animal Farm*. Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* provides a model for the imaginary journey, while the history of literary utopias stretches—to take it no further—from More’s sixteenth-century *Utopia*, to Butler’s *Erewhon* (1872), Morris’s *News From Nowhere* (1891), and Huxley’s *Brave New World* (1932). It is essential for the satirist’s purpose to shock us into seeing our own familiar world through unfamiliar eyes; some radical change of perspective is therefore absolutely necessary. Each of the three devices, the beast fable, the imaginary journey, and Utopian fantasy achieves this end” (1-2).

(1980) Mary McCarthy, *Ideas and the Novel*: “As I was saying, if you are going to voice ideas in a novel, plainly you will need a spokesman. In the traditional novel such semi-official figures are familiar to us and, on the whole, welcome. We quickly learn to recognize which of the character will be a stand-in for the author, that is, which one we can trust as appointed representative with full powers to comment on what is happening and draw the necessary conclusions. There is nothing wrong with this; events in life seldom speak for themselves. Whether it is world events that confront us or local skullduggery—an ecological scandal or somebody running off with a friend’s wife—we frequently want somebody to explain them to us, sketch in the background, suggest where our sympathies should lie. There is no reason we should be worse off in a novel, as long as the novel is assumed to have some reasonably close connection with our immediate life or a life we are acquainted with through reading and report.

“The novel in its classic period—the nineteenth century—took on that burden without protest. Protest only began to be heard toward the end of the century, when the novel, aggrieved by how much it had been expected to carry on its increasingly slender shoulders, made the first motions toward emancipation. Up until James, the novelist had been a quite willing authority figure, a parent, aunt, in Tolstoy’s case a Dutch uncle. The popular novelist (and there was no other kind, the art novel not having been discovered) was looked up to as an authority on all sorts of matters: medicine, religion, capital punishment, the right relation between the sexes. If the role was uncongenial or momentarily wearisome, he had the resort of the short story or the tale to turn to, neither of which carried such heavy responsibilities to the common life” (30-31).

(1980) Edward Said, Ed., “Preface,” *Literature and Society*: “Anyone who has attended the English Institute over the past decade will agree that an important intellectual shift took place during that period. Not every paper presented then exemplified the shift, but a significant, or at least a noticeable, number did. The simplest way of describing this change is to say that many people became interested in criticism, not as a kind of literate, discriminating gloss on a ‘primary’ text, but as an activity that, in drawing on such disciplines as linguistics, psychoanalysis, anthropology, and philosophy, made much of itself as a highly specialized, often tendentious theoretical mode of discourse. One result is that the accepted reliance on the work of literature as coming before criticism not only in time but also in value was given up. A critic now seemed to draw many of his or her insights from another critic, and looked to other criticism rather than to poetry, say, for his or her best thought. Certainly this has often been the case with criticism since Coleridge, but rarely before has criticism seemed so self-sufficient...and the net effect has been a new sense of freedom and speculation in the production of criticism.

“But there have been drawbacks, and where we come to the putative mission of a volume like this one, none of whose authors can be considered *arrière* when it comes to using and understanding the most recent developments in the New New Criticism, as it has come to be called. My own estimate is that a paradoxical situation exists today. On the one hand there has never been so much attention to and debate about criticism; on the other hand, rarely has there been such a removal of criticism and critical attention from the ongoing production of society and history. (I would like to be understood here as speaking self-critically, since my own work and my own sympathies have always been engaged with the New New Criticism.) A mode of thought developed in the social,

political, and cultural circumstances of Paris or Vienna or Berlin gets adopted in the American academy as a mode of thought, just that, and it has rapidly tended to become an orthodoxy mindlessly followed by a whole band of academic enthusiasts. To read an 'advanced' critic today is often to read writing that is essentially a highly rarified jargon. The historical sense, the rudiments of scholarship and curiosity (which in the past have always characterized even the most abstract of serious theorists), seem no longer to have much to tell a new theorist. Above all, in much of the New New Criticism the issues debated do not involve values or social and cultural questions or urgent philosophical questions; they most often are about 'texts' (so that one is made to feel that there are only texts), they deal in complex abstractions whose main reference is to other complex abstractions, their dense language belies a thin texture of ideas, experience, history.

"Having said all this, I must not seem to be saying that I agree with many of the attacks on the New New Criticism now appearing in journals here and abroad. Most of those attacks are made from the rather empty standpoint of 'humanistic' scholarship, which seems no less marginal, unworldly, and rarified than some of the theory being attacked. No: the New New Criticism has provided the current generation of literary and humanistic students with invaluable insights into cultural activity, and these must not be thrown out wholesale in the interests of a discredited conservative philosophy of gentlemanly refinement, or sensibility..." (vii-ix).

"In sum, this volume of essays from the English Institute demonstrates the vitality of the interchange in criticism between literature and society. No attempt has been made to have these essays make any monolithic affirmation (or definition) of either a literature or a society, though this is not to say that our critics pretend to value-free neutrality. At very least, then, this volume is a collective act of critical consciousness, as much to be regarded for critical knowledge as for social-historical engagement" (xi).

(1980) Michael Wilding, *Political Fictions*: "A radical criticism needs to be responsive to a radicalism of form as well as content. Marxist criticism has not traditionally been happy in this area. Marx, Engels, Lenin, Plekhanov, Trotsky, Lukács, all preferred the products of nineteenth-century realism to any other available fictional modes. As a result, works of radical content and radical form have tended to be neglected by both conservative and radical critics. The fictions dealt with there demonstrate a search for alternatives to realism – through vernacular picaresque, dream vision, imaginary book, found manuscript, collage, utopian projection, dystopian fable, neo-neoclassicism, and through various mixed modes. This is not an attempt to offer an alternative 'great tradition' or indeed any tradition at all. The varieties of experiment are all different in nature. But what they predominantly share is a constant search for the appropriate mode, radical both formally and politically, revolutionary as fiction as well as in the transmitted consciousness, the better to transmit that consciousness" (19-20).

"Jack London's *The Iron Heel* details the lengths to which capitalism will go to hold off the achievement of socialism... The ballot is tied to big business; if by some chance the socialists win an election, despite attempts by big business to prevent that from happening, then the trusts will remove the elected socialists from power....

"*The Iron Heel* [reflects] present realities... a world of USA-based multinational corporations working in accord with and through secret agencies, like the CIA, to topple

socialism and set up reactionary regimes in South America, Asia, and Australia....”

“The conscious and deliberate complementing of popular romance narrative with the documentary tone of the footnotes and the theoretical discussions within the body of the novel, the juxtaposition of narrative flow with fragmentation, produce the unique tone of *The Iron Heel*. London is writing about revolution, and produces a revolutionary experiment in form....

“[In the novel] an important, major component...is the tragic – something continually problematic for socialist art. London recognizes the problem – so includes and then subsumes the tragic into an overall optimistic, positive framework. But he does this not by reducing the tragic; in no way does he undercut it. The individual tragedy of Everhard and the revolution is clear enough; but the wider time-span places the tragic into a finally positive scheme. In this same context, the positive hero so beloved of socialist criticism is presented by London in a novelistically satisfying way. The positive aspects of [the main character Ernest] Everhard are dominant, and would satisfy any socialist realist; but the problems associated with the positive hero, the tiresomeness that seems a recurrent concomitant, are here mitigated and qualified by London’s broader dimension – putting the positive hero in a tragic situation, placing the positiveness in an historical period that is unreceptive and in appropriate to such positiveness...

“And the final distinction of *The Iron Heel* is this positive not that subsumes the tragic. It is not a naïve positiveness. The details of three centuries of repression are spelled out fully enough. But what the novel so persuasively asserts, is that ultimately the Brotherhood of Man will triumph; that the period of repression is inevitably doomed. The force of will of the plutocracy may be able to extend it – even as long as three centuries. But in the end socialism will eventually emerge” (92-126).

**(1981)** Toni Cade Bambara, “Foreword,” *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (Moraga and Anzaldúa, Eds.): “This Bridge documents particular rites of passage. Coming of age and coming to terms with community – race, group, class, gender, self – its expectations, supports, and lessons. And coming to grips with its perversions – racism, prejudice, elitism, misogyny, homophobia, and murder. And coming to terms with the incorporation of disease, struggling to overthrow the internal colonial/pro-racist loyalties – color/hue/hair caste within the household, power perversities engaged in under the guise of ‘personal relationships,’ accommodation to and collaboration with self-ambush and amnesia and murder. And coming to grips with those false awakenings too that give us ease as we substitute a militant mouth for a radical politic, delaying our true coming of age as committed, competent, principled combatants.

“There is more than a hint in these pages that too many of us still equate tone with substance, a hot eye with clear vision, and congratulate ourselves for our political maturity. For of course it takes more than pique to unit our wrath (‘the capacity of heat to change the shape of things’-Moraga) and to wrest power from those who have it and abuse it, to reclaim our ancient powers lying dormant with neglect (‘I wanna ask billie to teach us how to use our voices like she used hers on that old 78 record’-gossett), and create new powers in arena where they never before existed. And of course it takes more than the self-disclosure and the bold glimpse of each others’ life documents to make the grand resolve to fearlessly work toward potent meshings. Takes more than a rinsed lens to face unblinkingly the particular twists of the divide and conquer tactics of this

moment: the practice of withdrawing small business loans from the Puerto Rican grocer in favor of the South Korean wig shop, of stripping from Black students the Martin Luther King scholarship fund fought for and delivering those funds up to South Vietnamese or white Cubans or any other group the government has made a commitment to in its greedy grab for empire....”

“The Bridge can help get us there. Can coax us into the habit of listening to each other and learning each other’s ways of seeing and being. Of hearing each other as we heard each other in Pat Lee’s *Freshstones*, as we heard each other in Pat Jones and Faye Chiang, et. al.’s *Ordinary Women*, as we heard each other in Fran Beale’s *Third World Women’s Alliance* newspaper. As we heard each other over the years in snatched time moments in hallways and conference corridors, caucusing between sets. As we heard each other in those split second interfacing of yours and mine and hers student union meetings. As we heard each other in that rainbow attempt under the auspices of IFCO years ago. And way before that when Chinese, Mexican, and African women in this country saluted each other’s attempts to form protective leagues....”

**(1983)** Terry Eagleton, “Conclusion: Political Criticism,” *Literary Theory: An Introduction*: “Radical critics...have a set of social priorities with which most people at present tend to disagree. This is why they are commonly dismissed as ‘ideological’, because ideology’ is always a way of describing other people’s interests rather than our own.”

**(1983)** A. P. Foulkes, *Literature and Propaganda* (from the Introduction and Conclusion): “If we refer to the nineteenth century as the Age of Ideology, then it seems even more appropriate to regard the present century as the Age of Propaganda.... The relationship of literature and art to propaganda is not at all straightforward, and would in any case be dismissed as insignificant by many modern critics, whose evaluative criteria would lead them to make a distinction between ‘real literature’ and ‘tendentious’ writing. Even so, George Orwell, who stated that ‘all art is to some extent propaganda’..., was probably closer to the truth than Hitler, who on one occasion was heard echoing the popular view that ‘art has nothing to do with propaganda’.... Not the least of ironies contained in these seemingly contradictory statements is the fact that Hitler’s remarks were addressed to Josef Goebbels who, as head of the Reich Ministry for Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda, had attempted to create a state apparatus for thought control which could have served as a model for the perfect totalitarian state depicted in Orwell’s novel *Nineteen-Eighty-Four*.... Propaganda does not often come marching towards us waving swastikas and chanting ‘Seig Heil’; its power lies in its capacity to conceal itself, to appear natural, to coalesce completely and indivisibly with the values and accepted power symbols of a given society. When Hitler claimed that art had nothing to do with propaganda he was anticipating a perfectly integrated Nationalist Socialist Germany whose art would spontaneously and unthinkingly reproduce the desired images and perceptions. Even in the early revolutionary period of the Third Reich, Goebbels, who had objected to the word propaganda being used in the title of his Ministry, insisted that ‘news is best given out in such a way that it appears to be without comment but is itself tendentious’.... If a simple principle can be derived from the discussion so far, it is that the recognition of propaganda can be seen as a function of the ideological distance

which separates the observer from the act of communication observed.... Hitler's assertion that art has nothing to do with propaganda does not contradict Orwell's statement that all art is propaganda, but is rather contained within it, for the propaganda-free art which Hitler envisaged was an art within which the values and beliefs of National Socialism would be dominant, invisible and totally natural. This 'illusion of pure aestheticism' was for Orwell a reminder that 'propaganda in some form or other lurks in every book, that every work of art has a meaning and a purpose—a political, social and religious purpose—that our aesthetic judgements are always coloured by our prejudices and beliefs'.... Although there is no ready-made method for detecting propaganda, we can become aware of the general categories in which it manifests itself and we can attempt to classify its techniques and forms.... This approach does not mean that we must study literature as a set of documents rather than as a set of aesthetic objects. For in effect it denies the validity of such a distinction by assuming that the propagandistic or demystifying moment of literary communication may be inseparable from its aesthetic function...."

**(1983)** Susan Rubin Suleiman, *Authoritarian Fictions: The Ideological Novel as Literary Genre*: "In ordinary critical usage, the term 'roman à thèse' has a strongly negative connotation; it designates works that are too close to propaganda to be artistically valid. No self-respecting writer would consent to call his novels by that name. A roman à thèse is always the work of an 'other'... There do exist a few critical studies, published quite a while ago, that discuss [certain] novels...as 'political novels' or as examples of 'committed' or engagé literature. Neither of these categories corresponds exactly, however, to the roman à thèse. The political novel as a generic category is at once too broad (Stendhal's *La Chartreuse de Parme* is, as Irving Howe has shown, a superb political novel, but it is not a roman à thèse) and too narrow (Mauriac's 'Catholic novel,' *Le Noeud de vipères*, is a roman à thèse, but not a political novel). As for 'littérature engagée,' it is too imprecise a term to designate a genre; furthermore, I feel it is too specifically associated with the name of Sartre, who did not invent the term but who made it current—and who, incidentally, went out of his way to distinguish 'engagé' novels from roman à thèse (although it may once again have been a matter of rejecting the name rather than the thing itself).... As a starting point, I propose the following definition: *a roman à thèse is a novel written in the realistic mode (that is, based on an aesthetic of verisimilitude and representation), which signals itself to the reader as primarily didactic in intent, seeking to demonstrate the validity of a political, philosophical, or religious doctrine....* One could...claim that every novel, indeed every work of fiction..., can be read as expounding a 'thesis,' to the extent that it is always possible to extract from it a general maxim of some kind.... Following this line of reasoning, one would soon have to conclude that the roman à thèse is everywhere and nowhere—in other words, that it is a phenomenon of *reading* (viewed from a certain angle, all works are didactic) rather than of writing. At that point, there would be no reason to try to define a *genre* called roman à thèse, for the concept of genre implies that there exist certain properties that texts have in common, not that (or not only that) there exist certain modes of reading—or as is commonly said nowadays, certain interpretive strategies—that can be applied to any and every text. [However]...I consider undeniable...: there exist nontrivial differences between and among texts, as well as

between readers, or between interpretive strategies that readers deploy in order to understand a text. Novels that are roman à thèse have certain identifiable traits which distinguish them from other novels and other genres. One of these traits, and no doubt the most important one is that romans à thèse formulate, in an insistent, consistent, and unambiguous manner, the thesis (or theses) they seek to illustrate.... Whether its thesis is conservative or radical, defending the status quo or calling for its abolition, the roman à thèse is essentially an authoritarian genre: it appeals to the need for certainty, stability, and unity that is one of the elements of the human psyche; it affirms absolute truths, absolute values” (3-10).

**(1983)** Introductory quotations from Susan Rubin Suleiman’s *Authoritarian Fictions*:

“Literature, as it has been understood by all the masters, is an interpretation of life. It eliminates in order to prove.” –Maurice Barrès

“All literature is propaganda. [...] Art, for us, is what makes propaganda effective, what is capable of moving men in the direction we wish.” –Paul Nizan

“Then comes the modern question: why is there not today (or at least so it seems to me), why is there no longer an art of intellectual persuasion, or imagination? Why are we so slow, so indifferent about mobilizing narrative and the image? Can’t we see that it is, after all, works of fiction, no matter how mediocre they may be artistically, that best arouse political passion?” –Roland Barthes

“...it is the very notion of a work created for the expression of a social, political, economic, moral, etc. content that constitutes a lie.”

–Alain Robbe-Grillet

**(1986)** Ishmael Reed, “Which State?” (1986), *Writing’ Is Fightin’* (1990): “The current literary establishment, which denies that it exists, is not only a powerful influence upon American intellectual and cultural trends but on political trends as well—both the left wing and right wing of the New York branch having advised political administrations since the 1960s.... The problem with the current literary-industrial complex of publishers, critics, writers, and slowpoke academia is that it can see cultural repression when it happens in other states but can’t recognize it when it’s practiced by its own state, the literary state....

“In 1976, ten years ago, a group of white and nonwhite ethnic writers decided that, instead of engaging in a time and energy consuming confrontation with the commercial literary institutions, we could best serve the literature we championed by establishing new institutions. We began the Before Columbus Foundation, devoted to the promotion of multiethnic literatures. The Before Columbus Foundation distributes books and magazines published by more than two hundred multiethnic presses and, beginning last year, represented these presses at international book fairs....

“We are not in opposition to the literary state; we’d like to enter into a dialogue with it. We’d like to cooperate with it. We’d like it to join us in projecting the United States as a planet-nation—a nation that is generated by diversity and cultural exchange between people from different backgrounds....

“We are not crude writers engaged in ugly rhetoric against things we disapprove of. We’re merely requesting that the literary industrial complex face up to the important changes that have occurred in American literature since the 1960s.”

(1987) Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands—La Frontera: The New Mestiza*: “In the 1960s, I read my first Chicano novel. It was *City of Night* by John Rechy, a gay Texan, son of a Scottish father and a Mexican mother. For days I walked around in stunned amazement that a Chicano could write and could get published. When I read *I Am Joaquín* I was surprised to see a bilingual book by a Chicano in print. When I saw poetry written in Tex-Mex for the first time, a feeling of pure joy flashed through me. I felt like we really existed as a people. In 1971, when I started teaching High School English to Chicano students, I tried to supplement the required texts with works by Chicanos, only to be reprimanded and forbidden to do so by the principal. He claimed that I was supposed to teach ‘American’ and English literature. At the risk of being fired, I swore my students to secrecy and slipped in Chicano short stories, poems, a play. In graduate school, while working toward a Ph.D., I had to ‘argue’ with one advisor after another, semester after semester, before I was allowed to make Chicano literature an area of focus.”

“Even before I read books by Chicanos or Mexicans, it was the Mexican movies I saw at the drive-in—the Thursday night special of \$1.00 a carload—that gave me a sense of belonging.... We’d watch Pedro Infante in melodramatic tear-jerkers like *Nosotros los pobres*, the first ‘real’ Mexican movie (that was not an imitation of European movies). I remember seeing *Cuando los hijos se van* and surmising that all Mexican movies played up the love a mother has for her children and what ungrateful sons and daughters suffer when they are not devoted to their mothers.... When watching Mexican movies, I felt a sense of homecoming as well as alienation. People who were to amount to something didn’t go to Mexican movies, or *bailes* or tune their radios to *bolero*, *rancherita*, and *corrido* music.”

The whole time I was growing up, there was *norteño* music sometimes called North Mexican border music, or Tex-Mex music, or Chicano music, or *cantina* (bar) music. I grew up listening to *conjuntos*, three- or four-piece bands made up of folk musicians playing guitar, *bajo sexto*, drums and button accordion, which Chicanos had borrowed from the German immigrants who had come to Central Texas and Mexico to farm and build breweries. In the Rio Grande Valley, Steve Jordan and Little Joe Hernández were popular, and Flaco Jiménez was the accordion king. The rhythms of Tex-Mex music are those of the polka, also adapted from the Germans, who in turn had borrowed the polka from the Czechs and Bohemians.

“I remember the hot, sultry evenings when *corridos*—songs of love and death on the Texas-Mexican borderlands—reverberated out of cheap amplifiers from the local *cantinas* and wafted through my bedroom window.

*Corridos* first became widely used along the South Texas/ Mexican border during the early conflict between Chicanos and Anglos. The *corridos* are usually about Mexican heroes who do valiant deeds against the Anglo oppressors. Pancho Villa’s song, ‘*La cucaracha*,’ is the most famous one. *Corridos* of John F. Kennedy and his death are still very popular in the Valley. Older Chicanos remember Lydia Mendoza, one of the great border *corrido* singers who was called *La Gloria de Tejas*. Her ‘*El tango Negro*,’ sung during the Great Depression, made her a singer of the people. The everpresent *corridos* narrated one hundred years of border history, bringing news of events as well as

entertaining. These folk musicians and folk songs are our chief cultural myth-makers, and they made our hard lives seem bearable.

“I grew up ambivalent about our music. Country-western and rock-and-roll had more status. In the 50s and 60s, for the slightly educated and *agringado* Chicanos, there existed a sense of shame at being caught listening to our music. Yet I couldn’t stop my feet from thumping to the music, could not stop humming the words, nor hide from myself the exhilaration I felt when I heard it” (59-61).

“In the ethno-poetics and performance of the shaman, my people, the Indians, did not split the artistic from the functional, the sacred from the secular, art from everyday life. The religious, social and aesthetic purposes were all intertwined.... The aesthetic of virtuosity, art typical of Western European cultures, attempts to manage the energies of its own internal system such as conflicts, harmonies, resolutions and balances. It bears the presences of qualities and internal meanings. It is dedicated to the validation of itself. Its task is to move humans by means of achieving mastery in content, technique, feeling. Western art is always whole and always ‘in power.’ It is individual (not communal). It is ‘psychological’ in that it spins its energies between itself and its witness” (67-68).

“My Chicana identity is grounded in the Indian woman’s history of resistance. The Aztec female rites of mourning were rites of defiance protesting the cultural changes which disrupted the equality and balance between female and male, and protesting their demotion to a lesser status, their denigration. Like *la Llorona*, the Indian woman’s only means of protest was wailing.

“So *mamá*, *Raza*, how wonderful, *no tener que rendir cuentas a nadie*. I feel perfectly free to rebel and to rail against my culture. I fear no betrayal on my part because, unlike Chicanas and other women of color who grew up white or who have only recently returned to their native cultural roots, I was totally immersed in mine. It wasn’t until I went to high school that I ‘saw’ whites. Until I worked on my master’s degree I had not gotten within an arm’s distance of them. I was totally immersed *en lo mexicano*, a rural, peasant, isolated, *mexicanismo*. To separate from my culture (as from my family) I had to feel competent enough on the outside and secure enough inside to live life on my own. Yet in leaving home I did not lose touch with my origins because *lo mexicano* is in my system. I am a turtle, where I go I carry ‘home’ on my back.”

“Not me sold out my people but they me. So yes, though ‘home’ permeates every sinew and cartilage in my body, I too am afraid of going home. Though I’ll defend my race and culture when they are attacked by non-*mexicanos*, *conosco el malestar de mi cultura*. I abhor some of my culture’s ways, how it cripples its women, *como burras*, our strengths used against us, lowly *burras* bearing humility with dignity. The ability to serve, claim the males, is our highest virtue. I abhor how my culture makes *macho* caricatures of its men. No, I do not buy all the myths of the tribe into which I was born. I can understand why the more tinged with Anglo blood, the more adamantly my colored and colorless sisters glorify their colored culture’s values—to offset the extreme devaluation of it by the white culture. It’s a legitimate reaction. But I will not glorify those aspects of my culture which have injured me and which have injured me in the name of protecting me.

“So, don’t give me your tenets and your laws. Don’t give me your lukewarm gods. What I want is an accounting with all three cultures—white, Mexican, Indian. I want the freedom to carve and chisel my own goods out of my entrails. And if going home is denied me then I will have to stand and claim my space, making a new culture—*una cultura mestiza*—with my own lumber, my own bricks and mortar and my own feminist architecture” (21-22).

(1987) Barbara Harlow, *Resistance Literature*: “The struggle for national liberation and independence, particularly in the twentieth century, on the part of colonized peoples in those areas of the world over which Western Europe and North America have sought socio-economic control and cultural dominion has produced a significant corpus of literary writing, both narrative and poetic, as well as a broad spectrum of theoretical analyses of the political, ideological, and cultural parameters of this struggle. This literature, like the resistance and national liberation movements which it reflects and in which it can be said to participate, not only demands recognition of its independent status and existence as literary production, but as such also presents a serious challenge to the codes and canons of both the theory and the practice of literature and its criticism as these have been developed in the West” (xvi).

“Resistance narratives, at the same time that they, each in its own way, propose historically specific analyses of the ideological and material conditions out of which they are generated, in Nicaragua, South Africa, El Salvador, Palestine, or elsewhere, contribute to a larger narrative, that of the passage from genealogical or hereditary ties of filiation to the collective bonds of affiliation.... The connection between knowledge and power, the awareness of the exploitation of knowledge by the interests of power to create a distorted historical record, is central to resistance narratives. The tradition to which Foucault is referring is a tradition which these narratives seek directly to transform. Within the texts and their analytical representation of the social histories of their characters that tradition is critically examined. The texts themselves, however, are immediate interventions into the historical record, attempting to produce and impart new historical facts and analyses, what Edward Said has referred to as ‘new objects for a new kind of knowledge..’ This requires that the historical record and the present agenda be rewritten” (116).

“Resistance literature, as this study has attempted to show, has in the past played a vital role in the historical struggle of the resistance movements in the context of which it was written (200). That same literature continues to enlist readers and critics in the First as in the Third Worlds in the active reconstruction of interrupted histories. Omar Cabezas, former FSLN guerrilla and author of *The Mountain is Something More than a Great Expanse of Green* (published in English as *Fire from the Mountain*), and now head of the Nicaraguan Ministry of the Interior’s Political Section, still maintains that:

To have participated as a guerrilla, to have written this book, son of a bitch: it’s dealt a real blow to the enemy. You feel like you could die after something like that. After that book and one more. Or that book and two more. Or that book and five more. Or just that book. What I want to say is it’s dealt a blow to

imperialism. I saw a photo, once, of a dead guerrilla in a Latin American country, and they showed everything he had in his knapsack: his plate, his spoon, his bedroll, his change of clothing, and *The Mountain is Something More than a Great Expanse of Green*. And I think back to when I was a guerrilla; when a guerrilla carries a book in his knapsack, it really means something.

**(1987-1999)** Noam Chomsky, *The Chomsky Reader*; biographies, etc...: “[Orwell’s Problem: how is it that oppressive ideological systems are able to] instill beliefs that are firmly held and widely accepted although they are completely without foundation and often plainly at variance with the obvious facts about the world around us?” “If Orwell, instead of writing *1984*—which was actually, in my opinion, his worst book, a kind of trivial caricature of the most totalitarian society in the world, which made him famous and everybody loved him, because it was the official enemy—if instead of doing that easy and relatively unimportant thing, he had done the hard and important thing, namely talk about Orwell’s Problem [as pertains to England and western states], he would not have been famous and honored: he would have been hated and reviled and marginalized.” [...] “About Orwell’s *1984*, I thought, frankly, it was one of his worst books. Could barely finish it. Some parts (e.g., about Newspeak) were clever. But most of it seemed to me—well, trivial. The problem is not a very interesting one; the modes of thought control and repression in totalitarian societies are fairly transparent. In fact, they often tend to be rather lax. Franco Spain, for example, didn’t care much what people thought and said: the screams from the torture chamber in downtown Madrid were enough to keep the lid on. It’s not too well known, but the Soviet Union was also pretty lax, particularly in the Brezhnev era. According to US government-Russian Research Center studies, Russians apparently had considerably wider access to a broad range of opinion and to dissident literature than Americans do, not because it is denied them but because propaganda is so much more effective here. Orwell was well aware of these issues. His (suppressed) introduction to *Animal Farm*, for example, deals explicitly with ‘literary censorship in England.’ To write about that topic would have been important, hard, and serious—and would have earned him the obloquy that attends departure from the rules.

“Caricature can be very well done. Swift is marvelous, for example. *Animal Farm* is pretty good, in my opinion. But *1984* I thought was a serious decline from his best work. Caricature is an art, and not an easy one. But when well done, a very important one. As for dealing with Orwell’s problem, I try to do it in the ways I know how to pursue; 1000s of pages by now. No doubt there are other ways, maybe better ways. But others will have to find what works for them. ...my co-author Edward Herman has done excellent work of caricature on Orwell’s problem. I am thinking of his work on ‘doublespeak,’ including a book, modeled more or less on Ambrose Bierce.”

“If you want to learn about people’s personalities and intentions, you would probably do better reading novels than reading psychology books. Maybe that’s the best way to come to an understanding of human beings and the way they act and feel, but that’s not science. Science isn’t the only thing in the world, it is what it is...science is not the only way to come to an understanding of things.” “If I am interested in learning about people, I’ll read novels rather than psychology.” “I think the Victorian novel tells us more about people than science ever will...and we will always learn more about human life and human

personality from novels than from scientific psychology.” “We learn from literature as we learn from life; no one knows how, but it surely happens. In fact, most of what we know about things that matter comes from such sources, surely not from considered rational inquiry (science), which sometimes reaches unparalleled depths of profundity, but has a rather narrow scope.” “It is almost certain that literature will forever give far deeper insight into what is sometimes called ‘the full human person’ than any modes of scientific inquiry may hope to do. “[However] I’ve been always resistant consciously to allowing literature to influence my beliefs and attitudes with regard to society and history.” “There are things I resonate to when I read, but I have a feeling that my feelings and attitudes were largely formed prior to reading literature.” “Look, there’s no question that as a child, when I read about China, this influenced my attitudes—Rickshaw Boy, for example. That had a powerful effect when I read it. It was so long ago I don’t remember a thing about it, except the impact. And I don’t doubt that, for me, personally, like anybody, lots of my perceptions were heightened and attitudes changed by literature over a broad range—Hebrew Literature, Russian literature, and so on. But ultimately, you have to face the world as it is on the basis of other sources of evidence that you can evaluate.” “If I want to understand the nature of China and its revolution, I ought to be cautious about literary renditions.” “Literature can heighten your imagination and insight and understanding, but it surely doesn’t provide the evidence that you need to draw conclusions and substantiate conclusions.” “I can think of things I read that had a powerful effect on me, but whether they changed my attitudes and understanding in any striking or crucial way, I can’t really say.” “People certainly differ, as they should, in what kinds of things make their minds work.” “I don’t really feel that I can draw any tight connections [personally].”

**(1988)** Nadine Gordimer, “The Essential Gesture,” *The Essential Gesture*: “Responsibility is what awaits outside the Eden of creativity.... The creative act is not pure. History evidences it. Ideology demands it. Society exacts it.... Roland Barthes wrote that...a writer’s ‘enterprise’ – his work – is his ‘essential gesture as a social being’.”

“One thing is clear: ours is a period when few can claim the absolute value of a writer without reference to a context of responsibilities. Exile as a mode of genius no longer exists.... What right has society to impose responsibility upon writers and what right has the writer to resist? I want to examine not what is forbidden by censorship – I know that story too well – but what we are bidden. I want to consider what is expected of us by the dynamic of collective conscience and the will to liberty in various circumstances and places; whether we should respond, and if so, how we do.

“‘It is from the moment when I shall no longer be more than a writer that I shall cease to write.’ One of the great of our period, Camus, could say that. In theory at least, as a writer he accepted the basis of the most extreme and pressing demand of our time. The ivory tower was finally stormed; and it was not with a white flag that the writer came out, but with manifesto unfurled and arms crooked to link with the elbows of the people. And it was not just as their chronicler that the compact was made; the greater value, you will note, was placed on the persona outside of ‘writer’: to be ‘no more than a writer’ was to

put an end to the justification for the very existence of the persona of 'writer'. Although the aphorism in its characteristically French neatness appears to wrap up all possible meanings of its statement, it does not. Camus's decision is a hidden as well as a revealed one. It is not just that he has weighed within himself his existential value as a writer against that of other functions as a man among men, and found independently in favour of the man; the scale has been set up by a demand outside himself, by his world situation. He has, in fact, accepted its condition that the greater responsibility is to society and not to art.

"Long before it was projected into that of a world war, and again after the war, Camus's *natal* situation was that of a writer in the conflict of Western world decolonisation – the moral question of race and power by which the twentieth century will be characterized along with its discovery of the satanic ultimate in power, the means of human self-annihilation. But the demand made upon him and the moral imperative it set up in himself are those of a writer anywhere where the people he lives among, or any sections of them marked out by race or colour or religion, are discriminated against and repressed...."

"Whether a writer is black or white, in South Africa the essential gesture by which he enters the brotherhood of man – which is the only definition of society that has any permanent validity – is a revolutionary gesture."

"The *transformation of experience* remains the writer's basic essential gesture; the lifting out of a limited category something that reveals its full meaning and significance only when the writer's imagination has expanded it. This has never been more evident than in the context of extreme experiences of sustained personal horror that are central to the period of twentieth-century writers."

"Their essential gesture can be fulfilled only in the integrity Chekhov demanded: 'to describe a situation so truthfully...that the reader can no longer evade it'."

(1988) Vincent B. Leitch, *American Literary Criticism from the 30s to the 80s* (Chapter Thirteen: "Leftist Criticism from the 1960s to the 1980s"): "When the MLA put together its centennial issue of PMLA in May 1984, it commissioned Paul Lauter to write about the impact of society on the profession of literary criticism between 1958 and 1983. Lauter was a radical associated with the Movement in the sixties.... According to Lauter, the MLA between the fifties and the eighties had expanded and diversified immensely, yet 'the hierarchy of the profession remains fundamentally unaltered, so—as yet—does the hierarchy of what we value'.... This conclusion was based on two surveys of hundreds of syllabi collected from around the nation in the eighties. Just as the reigning critical ideology in the late 1950s was 'formalism,' so the dominant mode of criticism in the 1980s was 'formalism,' however expanded to include hermeneutics, semiotics, and poststructuralism, all of which criticism 'accepts the formalist stance by analyzing texts, including its own discourse, primarily as autonomous objects isolated from their social origins or functions'.... What most dismayed Lauter about such fashionable criticism were its alignment with linguistics and philosophy rather than history and sociology, its tendency to become obscurant self-referential metacriticism in a debauch of

professionalism, its preference for a limited canon of elitist texts, its increasing abnegation of practical exegesis and humanistic values, and its deepening occupation of the core of the profession”.... [Even the rebirth of Marxist criticism in the 1970s deviated from “history and sociology” in that]: “What was odd about the Marxist criticism of this [1970s] Renaissance associated with the post-1950s new left and the Movement was its complete disregard of the old left. Mention was never made of V. F. Calverton, James T. Farrell, Granville Hicks, Bernard Smith, Edmund Wilson, or other Leftist Critics prominent in the thirties. The native tradition of radicalism stemming from the nineteenth century had been forgotten during the heyday of the new left....”

“In H. Bruce Franklin’s view, what was wrong with academic literary professionals was their thorough immersion in the bourgeois ideology of formalism, which itself was rooted in the counterrevolutionary antiproletarianism of the thirties. ‘In the present era, formalism is the use of aestheticism to blind us to social and moral reality’....”

“Rather than an instrument or weapon of ruling-class oppression, literature was potentially liberating [in the view of Louis Kampf], provided it was set within a living context close to daily life and removed from its sacrosanct place in the great tradition. ‘In spite of our academic merchants, literature is not a commodity, but the sign of a creative act which expresses personal, social, and historical needs. As such it constantly undermines the status quo.’ The task of the radical critic was to destroy received dogmas and procedures, letting literature be an instrument of agitation and resistance and a force for freedom and genuine liberation. ‘As members of the educated middle class, we must learn that our words should discredit our own culture. Those of us who are literary intellectuals and teachers ought to illustrate in our work that the arts are not alone available to those who are genteel...’.”

(1989) D. J. Taylor, “Writers, Politics and Society,” *A Vain Conceit: British Fiction in the 1980s*: “Though an air of genteel quietism has hung lazily over the English novel, manifesting itself occasionally in the conviction that art is somehow ‘above’ politics or that no civilized person would ever want to bother himself with the governance of his country, there is a long and fairly honourable tradition of writers intervening or interfering in domestic politics. Naturally, this is not something that officialdom has ever welcomed. Characteristically the relationship between writers and politicians has always been uneasy, a fragile dialogue liable to distortion, resentment and cheerful malice. It is said that Macaulay declined to review *Hard Times* on account of its ‘sullen socialism’, and how much socialism is there in *Hard Times*? But then it used to be customary to refer to Cubist paintings as ‘Bolshevist’, and even today, in the wake of countless revisionist biographies, it is never quite possible to rid Kipling of the tag ‘Imperialist writer’.

“That this sort of resentment persists is a testimony to the compartmentalization of modern life. Even today the notion that a novelist might have political ideas floating about in his head and might want to give them a public airing is calculated to make the average newspaper columnist seethe with rage. The 1987 General Election campaign was remarkable for the ardour with which right-wing papers attacked various writers, dramatists and whatnot who had made the indelicate mistake of announcing that they intended to vote Labour. In this atmosphere of suspicion it is hardly surprising that the most recent engagement between the pen and the Statue Book, Lady Antonia Fraser’s little dinner for a group of anti-Thatcherite writers and the establishment of the June 20

group, quickly declined into a riot of personal attacks. What did Lady Antonia think she knew about it? What, for that matter, did any pen pusher think that he or she knew about anything? It is a queer paradox, this. Journalists on all sides cry out for writers to be 'relevant' and as soon as they perform an act as relevant as expressing a political preference they are somehow seen to be engaged in a sort of spiritual trespassing.

"Yet the gathering *au côté de chez Fraser* did at least ventilate the comparatively musty issue of what a writer thinks about the way in which society is controlled and administered. This resolves itself into a number of broad questions; not so much: why should a writer bother to have political opinions and presume to prosecute them...but: is it possible, amid the dense and unpromising chaos that surrounds us, for writers to influence people? If so, how? If not, why not? On the face of it nothing could be more straightforward. X the novelist writes a book read by reader Y who, after mature reflection, allows it to colour his views as to matter Z. This ignores the fact that no art is simply message, but admits the power of novels to effect change. When Upton Sinclair wrote *The Jungle*, his famous exposé of the turn-of-the-century Chicago meat-packing factories, there was a public outcry and the laws were changed within months. You can just imagine the bureaucratic recrimination, the legal rearguard actions, the closing of ranks on the part of vested interests that would spring neatly into place if, for instance, someone were to write a novel set in Suffolk village about the carcinogenic effects of the local power station. In 1904 the mechanisms which linked art and society were substantially more clear-cut" (24-25).

(1989) Tom Wolfe, "Stalking the Billion-Footed Beast," *Harpers*: "That task [of writing accomplished (social) novels], as I see it, inevitably involves reporting, which I regard as the most valuable and least understood resource available to any writer with exalted ambitions, whether the medium is print, film, tape, or the stage. Young writers are constantly told, 'Write about what you know.' There is nothing wrong with that rule as a starting point, but it seems to get quickly magnified into an unspoken maxim: The only valid experience is personal experience.

"Emerson said that every person has a great autobiography to write, if only he understands what is truly his own unique experience. But he didn't say every person had *two* great autobiographies to write. Dickens, Dostoyevski, Balzac, Zola, and Sinclair Lewis *assumed* that the novelist had to go beyond his personal experience and head out into society as a reporter. Zola called it documentation, and his documenting expeditions to the slums, the coal mines, the races [...] notebook and pen in hand, became legendary."

"Was it reporting that made Lewis the most highly regarded American novelist of the 1920s? Certainly not by itself. But it was the material he found through reporting that enabled Lewis to exercise with such rich variety his insights, many of them exceptionally subtle, into the psyches of men and women and into the status structure of society. Having said that, I will now reveal something that practically every writer has experienced—and none, as far as I know, has ever talked about. The young person who decides to become a writer because he has a subject or an issue in mind, because he has 'something to say,' is a rare bird. Most make that decision because they realize they have a certain musical facility with words... As he grows older, however, our young genius

keeps running into this damnable problem of material, of what to write about... He tells himself that 95 percent of literary genius is the unique talent that is secure inside some sort of crucible in his skull and 5 percent is the material, the clay his talent will mold... Finally, you realize you have a choice. Either hide from it, wish it away, or wrestle with it. I doubt that there is a writer over forty who does not realize in his heart of hearts that literary genius, in prose, consists of proportions more on the order of 65 percent material and 35 percent of the talent in the sacred crucible.”

“...one last point. It is not merely that reporting is useful in gathering the *petis faits vrais* that create verisimilitude and make a novel gripping or absorbing, although that side of the enterprise is worth paying attention to. My contention is that, especially in an age like this, they are essential for the very greatest effects literature can achieve....”

“Philip Roth was absolutely right. The imagination of the novelist is powerless before what he knows he’s going to read in tomorrow morning’s newspaper. But a generation of American writers has drawn precisely the wrong conclusion from that perfectly valid observation. The answer is not to leave the rude beast, the material, also known as the life around us, to the journalists but to do what journalists do, or are supposed to do, which is to wrestle the beast and bring it to terms.

“...If fiction writers do not start facing the obvious, the literary history of the second half of the twentieth century will record that journalists not only took over the richness of American life as their domain but also seized the high ground of literature itself. Any literary person who is willing to look back over the American literary terrain of the past twenty-five years—look back candidly, in the solitude of the study—will admit that in at least four years out of five the best nonfiction books have been *better literature* than the most highly praised books of fiction. Any truly candid observer will go further. In many years, the most highly praised books of fiction have been overshadowed *in literary terms* by writers whom literary people customarily dismiss as ‘writers of popular fiction’ (a curious epithet) or as genre novelists... Leaving the question of talent aside, [such novelists] have one enormous advantage over their more literary confreres. They are not only willing to wrestle the beast; they actually love the battle.”

**(1990)** Toni Cade Bambara, *Black Women Writers at Work* (Claudia Tate, Ed.): “I start with the recognition that we are at war, and that war is not simply a hot debate between the capitalist camp and socialist camp over which economic/political/social arrangement will have hegemony in the world. It’s not just the battle over turf and who has the right to utilize resources for whomsoever’s benefit. The war is also being fought over the truth: what is the truth about human nature, about the human potential? My responsibility to myself, my neighbors, my family and the human family is to try to tell the truth. That ain’t easy. There are so few truth-speaking traditions in this society in which the myth of ‘Western civilization’ has claimed the allegiance of so many. We have rarely been encouraged and equipped to appreciate the fact that the truth works, that it releases the Spirit and that it is a joyous thing. We live in a part of the world, for example, that equates criticism with assault, that equates social responsibility with naïve idealism, that defines the unrelenting pursuit of knowledge and wisdom as fanaticism.” “I do not think that literature is *the* primary instrument for social transformation, but I do think it has

potency. So I work to tell the truth about people's lives; I work to celebrate struggle, to applaud the tradition of struggle in our community, to bring to center stage all those characters, just ordinary folks on the block..." "It would be dishonest, though, to end my comments there. First and foremost I write for myself..."

**(1990)** Audre Lorde, *Black Women Writers at Work* (Claudia Tate, Ed.): "I see protest as a genuine means of encouraging someone to feel the inconsistencies, the horror of the lives we are living. Social protest is saying that we do not have to live this way. If we feel deeply, and we encourage ourselves and others to feel deeply, we will find the germ of our answers to bring about change. Because once we recognize what it is we are feeling, once we recognize we can feel deeply, love deeply, can feel joy, then we will demand that all parts of our lives produce that kind of joy. And when they do not, we will ask, 'Why don't they?' And it is the asking that will lead us inevitably to social change. So the question of social protest and art is inseparable for me. I can't say it is an either-or proposition. Art for art's sake doesn't really exist for me. What I saw was wrong, and I had to speak up. I loved poetry and I loved words. But what was beautiful had to serve the purpose of changing my life, or I would have died. If I cannot air this pain and alter it, I will surely die of it. That's the beginning of social protest."

**(1990)** Pancho Savery, "The Third Plane at the Change of the Century: The Shape of African-American Literature to Come," *Left Politics and the Literary Profession* (Davis and Mirabella, Eds.): "What follows is a brief history of the two great cultural explosions in African-American history, the Harlem Renaissance and the Black Arts movement, and a discussion of the writers of the Third Plane, writers who have come to prominence since the late 1960s.... Writing fifty years ago in his classic of literary criticism *To Make a Poet Black*, Saunders Redding pointed out that two problems plagued African-American literature. On the one hand was the desire of black people to 'adjust...to the American environment.' This created what Redding called a 'literature of necessity,' motivated by ends. On the other hand was the motivation by means. African-American writers were plagued by what DuBois called in *The Souls of Black Folk* 'this double-consciousness.' In Redding's words, 'if they wished to succeed they have been obliged to satisfy two different (and opposed when not entirely opposite) audiences, the black and the white.' Until very recently, Redding's outline has remained true. African-American writers have been pushed and pulled, and the result has been that consistent quality has been rare. In *To Make a Poet Black* and in subsequent works Redding praises a very small number of writers working before the 1940s. Chief among these are Sterling Brown, James Weldon Johnson, Langston Hughes, Jean Toomer, and Zora Neale Hurston. What unites these writers is an 'acknowledgment of their debt to the folk material'."

**(1991)** bell hooks, "Narratives of Struggle," *Critical Fictions: The Politics of Imaginative Writing* (Philomena Mariani, Ed.): "Critical fictions emerge when the imagination is free to wander, explore, question, transgress. Years ago, I heard Ivan Van Sertima speak about *They Came Before Columbus*, his work documenting the presence of Africans in the 'New World.' Commenting on black liberation struggles globally, he asserted that it is not just our minds that have been colonized, but our imaginations. Thinking about the

imagination in a subversive way, not seeing it as a pure, uncorrupted terrain, we can ask ourselves under what conditions and in what ways can the imagination be decolonized. Globally, literature that enriches resistance struggles speaks about the way the individuals in repressive, dehumanizing situations use imagination to sustain life and maintain critical awareness. In oppressive settings the ability to construct images imaginatively of a reality not present to the senses or perceived may be the only means to hope. How many of us in our daily life think about the connection between our capacity to imagine and resistance struggle? Often in radical circles, the imaginative mind is perceived as threatening, as though it will obstruct and disrupt progressive action. Certainly it is useful in a culture of domination to project the sense that the imagination is primarily useful as a means to produce fantasy....”

“...it is difficult for the writer in the United States to find publishers for critical fictions. Again it must be reiterated that a growing interest on the part of publishers and consumers in works by writers of color does not mean that the works that are published and most talked about are necessarily critical fictions. Although work by black women writers seems to be receiving unprecedented attention at this historical moment in this society, much of that work is in no way subversive. Perhaps it is a bitter commentary to think that writers may strategically include passages or chapters in work so that it appears to be a critical intervention even as the overall work in no way breaks with prevailing oppressive and repressive norms. Such moments may merely reflect contradictions. Interest in works by black women writers should not blind us to the reality that this society does not support or affirm the production of critical fictions by black women....”

**(1991)** Maxine Hong Kingston, “The Novel’s Next Step,” *Critical Fictions: The Politics of Imaginative Writing* (Philomena Mariani, Ed.): “I’m going to give you a head start on the book that somebody ought to be working on. The hands of the clock are minutes away from nuclear midnight. And I am slow, each book taking me longer to write... So let me set down what has to be done, and maybe hurry creation, which is about two steps ahead of destruction.... All the writer has to do is make Wittman [hero of her novel, *Tripmaster Monkey*] grow up, and Huck Finn and Holden Caulfield will grow up. We need a sequel to adolescence—an idea of the humane beings that we may become. And the world will have a sequel.... The dream of the great American novel is past. We need to write the Global novel.... The danger is that the Global novel has to imitate chaos: loaded guns, bombs, leaking boats, broken-down civilizations, a hole in the sky, broken English, people who refuse connections with others.... How to stretch the novel to comprehend our times—no guarantees of inherent or eventual order—without having it fall apart? How to integrate the surreal, society, our psyches?” (200).

**(1991)** Alix Kates Shulman, “The Taint,” *Critical Fictions: The Politics of Imaginative Writing* (Philomena Mariani, Ed.): “A feminist critic I much admire...proposes that the smallest and least mushy category [of feminist writing], the most neglected and thereby the most interesting one, is Feminist Fiction with capital F’s – that is, fiction by political women for whom the contemporary women’s movement was one of the major experiences of their lives, an experience leaving its traces in virtually all their thought

and work. This, she contends, is probably what most people think of when they hear the term Feminist Fiction, anyway: politically engaged fiction....

“Together we review the fiction we know and come up with a short list of Feminist Works, including books by Margaret Atwood, Angela Carter, Marilyn French, Ursula K. Le Guin, Maxine Hong Kingston, Marge Piercy, Joanna Russ, Jane Rule, Alice Walker, Fay Weldon, Monique Wittig....

“The list my friend and I compiled seemed surprisingly short. Why? Perhaps because revolutions, social or political, may be just too noisy and intense to give rise to an extensive literature, which must be created in hours and years of reflective calm. From experience I know well that activists’ energies are directed outward, writers’ energies inward. It’s probably as easy to record a revolution from the midst of it when everyone is working at fever pitch as it is to write a novel standing in a rush-hour subway train...” (83-84).

(1993) Barbara Foley, “Art or Propaganda,” *Radical Representations: Politics and Form in U.S. Proletarian Fiction, 1929-1941*: “The 1930s literary radicals, I have demonstrated, brought various considerations to bear in their definitions of proletarian literature. There was, however, no party line on the subject. As Jack Conroy remarked retrospectively about the debates over what proletarian literature was, ‘We used to talk about it endlessly and never arrived at any definite conclusion’.... Even if writers did not feel bound to one or another definition of proletarian literature, [certain] critics argue, they felt obliged to conform to a rigid didacticism involving stock characters, formulaic plots, and a programmatic optimism. Art had to be a weapon and, as such, an instrument of propaganda. But since art and propaganda are antagonistically opposed, left-wing didactic literature was condemned to mouthing slogans and preaching conversion to the cause.

“In future chapters we will have the opportunity to determine whether proletarian novels were in fact as formulaic and predictable as their detractors charge. What I shall argue in this chapter is that there is very limited validity to the charge that routinely accompanies accusations of political straitjacketing—namely, that Third-Period Marxist critics, as mouthpieces for the party line, sought to impose a specifically propagandistic view of literature upon the writers in the party orbit. I shall show that left-wing literary commentators only rarely promoted the notion that literary works should impart or promote specific tenets of party doctrine; insofar as the critics had a coherent aesthetic theory, this theory was almost exclusively cognitive and reflectionist rather than agitational and hortatory. Indeed, I shall argue that in certain important ways the American approach to questions of representation and ideology was committed—as was the dominant tendency in all Marxist criticism of this period, Soviet and European—to a number of premises about literary form that were bourgeois rather than revolutionary. Literary radicals might applaud proletarian novelists whose works encouraged revolutionary class partisanship. Gold hailed Conroy as ‘a proletarian shock-trooper whose weapon is literature’; the novelist Ruth McKenney wrote Isidor Schneider that his *From the Kingdom of Necessity* was ‘a more powerful weapon than any tear gas the other side can manufacture.’ In general, however, commentators, critics and novelists alike, held back from theorizing—let alone legislating—any of the representational maneuvers specific to this literary weaponry. Their espoused commitment to the notion that all

literature is propaganda for one side or another in the class struggle was countered by a deep antipathy to viewing proletarian literature as propagandistic in any of its distinctive rhetorical strategies. The 1930s radicals never fully repudiated the bourgeois counterposition of art to propaganda: to them, proletarian literature contained very different values and assumptions, but as literature, it was just like any other kind of writing. Ironically, to the extent that they were prescriptive in advocating any given set of aesthetic principles, the Marxist critics urged a largely depoliticized conception of mimetic practice that coexisted only uneasily with many of the values and ideas that they congratulated writers for articulating in their texts” (129-131).

(1993) Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*: “Much of what was so exciting for four decades about Western modernism and its aftermath—in, say, the elaborate interpretative strategies of critical theory or the self-consciousness of literary and musical forms—seems almost quaintly abstract, desperately Eurocentric today. More reliable now are the reports from the front line where struggles are being fought between domestic tyrants and idealist oppositions, hybrid combinations of realism and fantasy, cartographic and archeological descriptions, explorations in mixed forms (essay, video or film, photograph, memoir, story, aphorism) of unhoused exilic experiences.”

“The major task, then, is to match the new economic and socio-political dislocations and configurations of our time with the startling realities of human interdependence on a world scale....”

“The fact is, we are mixed in with one another in ways that most national systems of education have not dreamed of. To match knowledge in the arts and sciences with these integrative realities is, I believe, the intellectual and cultural challenge of the moment....”

“Surely it is one of the unhappiest characteristics of the age to have produced more refugees, migrants, displaced persons, and exiles than ever before in history, most of them as an accompaniment to and, ironically enough, as afterthoughts of great post-colonial and imperial conflicts.”

“The émigré consciousness—a mind of winter, in Wallace Steven’s phrase—discovers in its marginality that ‘a gaze averted from the beaten track, a hatred of brutality, a search for fresh concepts not yet encompassed by the general pattern, is the last hope for thought’.”

“The modern history of literary study has been bound up with the development of cultural nationalism, whose aim was first to distinguish the national canon, then to maintain its eminence, authority, and aesthetic autonomy.... [There has been] an absolute requirement for the Western system of ideology that a vast gulf be established between the [ostensibly] civilized West, with its traditional commitment to human dignity, liberty, and self-determination, and the [supposed] barbaric brutality of those who for some reason—perhaps defective genes—fail to appreciate the depth of this historic commitment, so well revealed by America’s Asian wars, for example.”

“A novel is the choice of one mode of writing from among many others, and the activity of writing is one social mode among several, and the category of literature is something created to serve various worldly aims, including and perhaps even mainly aesthetic ones. Thus the focus in the destabilizing and investigative attitudes of those whose work actively opposes states and borders is on how a work of art, for instance, begins *as* a work, begins *from* a political, social, cultural situation, begins *to do* certain things and not others....”

“Contamination is the wrong word to use here, but some notion of literature and indeed all culture as hybrid...and encumbered, or entangled and overlapping with what used to be regarded as extraneous elements—this strikes me as *the* essential idea for the revolutionary realities today, in which the contests of the secular world so provocatively inform the texts we both read and write” (317).

“I keep coming back—simplistically and idealistically—to the notion of opposing and alleviating coercive domination, transforming the present by trying rationally and analytically to lift some of its burdens, situating the works of various literatures [or genres, say fiction and non-fiction] with reference to one another and to their historical modes of being. What I am saying is that in the configurations and by virtue of the transfigurations taking place around us, readers and writers are now in fact secular intellectuals with the archival, expressive, elaborative, and moral responsibilities of that role” (319).

(1994) Dorothy Allison, *Skin: Talking About Sex, Class & Literature*: “The difficulty faced by lesbian and feminist writers of my generation becomes somewhat more understandable if we think about the fact that almost no lesbian-feminist writer my age was able to make a living as a writer. Most of us wrote late at night after exhausting and demanding jobs, after evenings and weekends of political activism, meetings, and demonstrations. Most of us also devoted enormous amounts of time and energy to creating presses and journals that embodied our political ideals, giving up the time and energy we might have used to actually do our own writing. During my involvement with *Quest*, I wrote one article. The rest of my writing time was given over to grant applications and fund-raising letters. I did a little better with *Conditions*, beginning to actually publish short stories, but the vast majority of work I did there was editing other people’s writing and again, writing grants and raising money. Imagine how few paintings or sculptures would be created if the artists all had to collectively organize the creation of canvas and paint, build and staff the galleries, and turn back all the money earned from sales into the maintenance of the system. Add to that the difficulty of creating completely new philosophies about what would be suitable subjects for art, what approaches would be valid for artists to take to their work, who, in fact, would be allowed to say what was valuable and what was not, or more tellingly, what could be sold and to whom. Imagine that system and you have the outlines of some of the difficulties faced by lesbian writers of my generation.

“As a writer, I think I lost at least a decade in which I might have done more significant work because I had no independent sense of my work’s worth. If Literature was a dishonest system by which the work of mediocre men and women could be praised

for how it fit into a belief system that devalued women, queers, people of color, and the poor, then how could I try to become part of it? Worse, how could I judge any piece of writing, how could I know what was good or bad, worthwhile or a waste of time? To write for that system was to cooperate in your own destruction, certainly in your misrepresentation. I never imagined that what we were creating was also limited, that it, too, reflected an unrealistic or dishonest vision. But that's what we did, at least in part, making an ethical system that insists a lightweight romance has the same worth as a serious piece of fiction, that there is no good or bad, no 'objective' craft or standards or excellence."

(1994) Michael Hanne, *The Power of the Story: Fiction and Political Change*: "Can a novel start a war, free serfs, break up a marriage, drive readers to suicide, close factories, bring about a law change, swing an election, or serve as a weapon in a national or international struggle? These are some of the large-scale, direct, social and political effects which have been ascribed to certain exceptional novels and other works of fiction over the last two hundred years or so. How seriously should we take such claims?"

"In their crudest form, assertions of this kind are obviously naïve, oversimplifying the complex ways in which literary texts can be said to 'work in the world' and oversimplifying, too, the causal processes required to account for a major social or political change. But is it possible to modify or refine such claims in the light of contemporary theory and historical research so that the mechanisms by which each text has engaged with the political forces of the time are adequately described? This book explores that general question through the close examination of five works, from several different countries and periods, for which remarkable direct political effects of one kind or another have been claimed..."

"Storytelling, it must be recognized from the start, is always associated with the exercise, in one sense or another, of power, of control. This is true of even the commonest and apparently most innocent form of storytelling in which we engage: that almost continuous internal narrative monologue which everyone maintains, sliding from memory, to imaginative reworking of past events, to fantasizing about the future, to daydreaming.... It is a curious thing that, in the liberal democracies, the word 'power' is used more frequently than any other by publishers and reviewers to indicate, and invite, approval of a work of narrative fiction.... This flooding of popular critical discourse with the term 'power' does not, of course, indicate a widespread belief in the capacity of narrative fiction to 'change the world.' The use of 'power'...indicates little more than approval of the novel's capacity to involve and move the individual reader emotionally. Indeed the term is so devalued as to imply a denial that narrative fiction can exercise power in a wider social and political sense.... Power, as is usual in a liberal democracy, is treated as individual and unproblematic, rather than collective, structural, and problematic.

"Two important corollaries follow from this: a) there is no public acknowledgement that literature plays a role in the maintenance of existing power structures and b) literature is seen as incapable of playing a seriously disruptive role within such a society.... If, in a liberal democracy, a piece of imaginative writing seeks or achieves social or political

influence that goes beyond such a limited conception of its proper power, it must either be nonliterature masquerading as literature or a literary work being manipulated and misused for nonliterary, propagandistic purposes.... In overtly authoritarian states whose form of government does not rely on liberal bourgeois conceptions of constitutionality, such as Russia under the Tsars or the Soviet Union under Stalin, these assumptions are entirely reversed. Literature is *required*, by a combination of censorship and patronage, to contribute to the maintenance of power as constituted at the time. The government's insistence on retaining tight control over what is written and published reflects the belief, which is most often shared by the regime's opponents, that fictional writing possesses an extreme potential for disruption."

"To anyone who is skeptical about the assertion that narrative fiction, in certain circumstances, plays a central role in the lives and political thinking of ordinary people, I recommend the earthy reminder provided in a letter to Solzhenitsyn by a reader of *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* living in the Ukraine, who wrote to the author: 'In Kharkov I have seen all kinds of queues—for the film *Tarzan*, butter, women's drawers, chicken giblets and horse-meat sausage. But I cannot remember a queue as long as the one for your book in the libraries'."

"One of the earliest, and best known, examples of a novel which is claimed to have exercised a massive, direct, social influence is Goethe's story of hopeless love, *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774), which is said to have so stirred the feelings of a whole generation of young readers all over Western Europe that a number were recorded as committing suicide in imitation of its lovesick hero. Of a very different kind is the impact claimed for the novels of Dickens and Charles Kingsley, which have been credited with contributing, through the exposure of some of the social evils of mid-nineteenth century Britain, to the most important pieces of reform legislation enacted in the later part of the century. Perhaps the most specific (and best-documented) claim for a novel's leading to significant legislative change relates to the publication in 1906 of Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*, which, through its depiction of the lives of workers in the Chicago meatpacking industry, is reliably said to have been instrumental in ensuring the passage of the Pure Food and Drug Act in the U.S. Congress a few months later.... (A curious knock-on effect of the widespread anxiety about the health risks associated with canned foods provoked by *The Jungle* was the immediate collapse of whole communities based on canning quite remote from Chicago—including those in my country, New Zealand.)"

**(1995)** Sharon M. Harris, *Redefining the Political Novel: American Women Writers, 1797-1901*: "Feminist theorists in many fields—history, literature, philosophy, political science, sociology, among others—have challenged assumptions underlying narrow definitions of the political. In the field of political science, Louise A. Tilly and Patricia Gurin, editors of *Women, Politics, and Change* (1990), have made significant contributions toward redefining 'politics' to include women as members of the polity. However, they exclude 'power struggles in the family' from their definition of politics, 'which is limited to the arena of the state or collective units within it...' (6). While their revised definition offers significant insights into how we can reconsider the idea of politics and the political, their exclusion of the family is disturbing for two reasons. First,

while they do include collectivism within the broad framework of the political, they denote is as 'protopolitical' (7). Second, their exclusion fails to recognize the family *as* a collective unit. I would argue not only that the family is a collective unit but also that, in political terms, the family, in its patriarchal structure and values, is a microcosmic representation of 'the state.' To exclude the family from the political, especially in studies of pre-twentieth-century America, is to deny that arena in which women have most experience and from which their knowledge of the need for change most often has been drawn...."

"At this point some readers must be asking themselves: if we are to acknowledge the conjunction of the social and the political, and view the self as politicised, how then can we talk about 'political novels' as a genre? It is a valid question, one that might be answered most succinctly by defining the political novel so as to include works that recognize the social consequences of political processes and the political consequences of social processes...."

"Nancy Fraser suggests that feminists must seek alternative theories of discourse that enable us better to understand 'how people's social identities are fashioned and altered over time...[and] how the cultural hegemony of dominant groups in society is secured and contested' (83).

"It is notable that the novelists surveyed in the essays contained in *Redefining the Political Novel* were interested in exploring the many avenues by which, overtly or covertly, the political both synthesized and dictated the social, especially in terms of women's lives. These works bring to the forefront debates by women novelists on the nature of political orders (both macrocosmically and in their microcosmic representations of family and social structures), the suppression of classes and races that are not part of the dominant culture in American society, and the means by which women's art forms have been controlled and defined under patriarchy.

"The contributors to this book are acting in accord with Fraser's demands: they have recognized the ways in which women novelists have consciously politicised the genre of the novel, beyond merely attending to overt political machinery. This book's chapters explore ways in which these novelists have exposed, satirized, addressed, and challenged unspoken political ideologies in art, in the workplace, in all facets of existence under patriarchy."

(1995) Jane Smiley, "Say It Ain't So, Huck: Second Thoughts on Mark Twain's 'Masterpiece,' *Harpers*, December 1995: "Ernest Hemingway, thinking of himself, as always, once said that all American literature grew out of *Huck Finn*. It undoubtedly would have been better for American literature, and American culture, if our literature had grown out of one of the best-selling novels of all time, another American work of the nineteenth century, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, which for its portrayal of an array of thoughtful, autonomous, and passionate black characters leaves *Huck Finn* far behind... The power of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is the power of brilliant analysis married to great wisdom of feeling. Stowe never forgets the logical end of any relationship in which one person is the subject and the other is the object. No matter how the two people feel, or what their intentions are, the logic of the relationship is inherently tragic and traps both parties until

the false subject/object relationship is ended. Stowe's most oft-repeated and potent representation of this inexorable logic is the forcible separation of family members, especially of mothers from children.... The grief and despair [the] women display is no doubt what T.S. Eliot was thinking of when he superciliously labeled *Uncle Tom's Cabin* 'sensationalist propaganda,' but, in fact, few critics in the nineteenth century ever accused Stowe of making up or even exaggerating such stories. One group of former slaves who were asked to comment on Stowe's depiction of slave life said that she had failed to portray the very worst, and Stowe herself was afraid that if she told some of what she had heard from escaped slaves and other informants during her eighteen years in Cincinnati, the book would be too dark to find any readership at all... One of Stowe's most skillful techniques is her method of weaving a discussion of slavery into the dialogue of her characters.... Stowe also understands that the real root of slavery is that it is profitable as well as customary.... The very heart of nineteenth-century American experience and literature, the nature and meaning of slavery, is finally what Twain cannot face in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.... Why, then, we may ask, did *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, for all its power and popularity, fail to spawn American literature? Fail, even, to work as a model for how to draw passionate, autonomous and interesting black literary characters? Fail to keep the focus of the American literary imagination on the central dilemma of the American experience: race? ... The real loss, though, is not to our literature but to our culture and ourselves, because we have lost the subject of how the various social groups who may not escape to the wilderness are to get along in society; and, in the case of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the hard-nosed, unsentimental dialogue about race that we should have been having since before the Civil War. Obviously, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is no more the last word on race relations than *The Brothers Karamazov* or *David Copperfield* is on any number of characteristically Russian or English themes and social questions.... When Stowe's voice, a courageously public voice—as demonstrated by the public arguments about slavery that rage throughout *Uncle Tom's Cabin*—fell silent in our culture and was replaced by the secretive voice of Huck Finn, who acknowledges Jim only when they are alone on the raft together out in the middle of the big river, racism fell out of the public world and into the private one where whites think it really is but blacks know it really isn't." "Should *Huckleberry Finn* be taught in the schools? The critics of the Propaganda Era laid the groundwork for the universal inclusion of the book in school curriculums by declaring it great. Although they predated the current generation of politicized English professors, this was clearly a political act.... I would rather my children read *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, even though it is far more vivid in its depiction of cruelty than Huck Finn, and this is because Stowe's novel is clearly and unmistakably a tragedy. No whitewash, no secrets, but evil, suffering, imagination, endurance, and redemption—just like life. Like little Eva, who eagerly but fearfully listens to the stories of the slaves that her family tries to keep from her, our children want to know what is going on, what has gone on, and what we intend to do about it. If 'great' literature has any purpose, it is to help us face up to our responsibilities instead of enabling us to avoid them once again by lighting out for the territory."

(1998) John Whalen-Bridge, *Political Fiction and the American Self*: "The academic study of the political novel begins confidently in 1924 with Morris Edmund Spears's founding study *The Political Novel*... The American version [of the political novel],

claimed Speare, has a more activist-pragmatic aim than the English: ‘A comparison [...] of the American with the English political novelist brings out one striking fact: that whereas in England the writers have often enough been interested in presenting the political panorama for the sake of panorama,—shall we say, art for art’s sake—American novelists have been mainly concerned with Reform’ (334). Some political novels lean toward political activism, some toward art for art’s sake. Speare observes that American novelists in particular were distinguished by their zeal for reform. This activist difference could help explain why the prejudice against political fiction is stronger in America than in other countries.

“Speare’s recognition of the partisan nature of political fiction is presented in disarmingly direct fashion. Contemporary readers who are so quick to find in Speare quaint signs of class privilege overlook the ways in which this reader from 1924 is ahead of today’s culture contests, wherein it must be continually reasserted that political struggle is an appropriate end of art. The demand for an absolute separation of politics and aesthetics is today rarely voiced as an imperative, but occasionally we happen upon it whole cloth. In the section of its booklet entitled ‘What the Endowment Does Not Support,’ the National Endowment of the Humanities makes it clear that it will support no projects that ‘Are directed at persuading an audience to a particular political, philosophical, religious, or ideological point of view, or that advocate a particular program of social change or action’ (6). This policy gives us a negative definition of the political novel to complement Speare’s positive description. His judgment that the American political novel is engaged in the business of Reform has become a much more controversial position since he first wrote it, and the reason is found in critical standards and even government policies that attack works of art that ‘advocate a particular program of social change.’ Art must affirm the status quo to receive NEH funding.

“The political novel exposes itself to economic and critical perils that are somewhat more focused than those faced by other novels; its author will receive fewer government grants, or it may be singled out for reproach in reviews. This condition has not always obtained to the same degree, and there have been moments in this century when challenges to the idea that politics and literature are unmixable discourses were particularly strong. Speare’s study is, nonetheless, the last one published in the United States to speak of the political novel without apology” (22-23).

(1999) [Barbara Kingsolver] *The Bellwether Prize for Fiction* “In support of a literature for social change”; [www.bellwetherprize.org](http://www.bellwetherprize.org): “Fiction has a unique capacity to bring difficult issues to a broad readership on a personal level, creating empathy in a reader’s heart for the theoretical stranger. Its capacity for invoking moral and social responsibility is enormous. Throughout history, every movement toward a more peaceful and humane world has begun with those who imagined the possibilities. The Bellwether Prize seeks to support the imagination of humane possibilities.

“Defining a literature of social change: Socially responsible literature, for the purposes of this award, may describe categorical human transgressions in a way that compels readers to examine their own prejudices. It may invoke the necessity for economic and social justice for a particular ethnic or social group, or it may explicitly examine movements that have brought positive social change. Or, it may advocate the preservation of nature by describing and defining accountable relationships between

people and their environment. The mere description of an injustice, or of the personal predicament of an exploited person, without any clear position of social analysis invoked by the writer, does not in itself constitute socially responsible literature. 'Social responsibility' describes a moral obligation of individuals to engage with their communities in ways that promote a more respectful coexistence.

"Clear, analytical and literary accounts of political and social injustice (either current or historical) include the following excellent examples: *Beloved*, by Toni Morrison; *Snow Falling on Cedars*, David Guterson; *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Harper Lee; *Crows Over a Wheatfield*, Paula Sharp; *Bastard Out of Carolina*, Dorothy Allison; *The Women's Room*, Marilyn French; *Memoirs of An Ex-Prom Queen*, Alix Kates Shulman; *Mean Spirit*, Linda Hogan; *Cloudsplitter*, Russell Banks; *The Poisonwood Bible*, Barbara Kingsolver; *The Color Purple*, Alice Walker. Other contemporary contributors to this tradition include Michael Dorris, Louise Erdrich, Ursula Hegi, Ursula K. LeGuin, Ruth Ozeki, Grace Paley, Marge Piercy, and John Edgar Wideman.

"These authors notwithstanding, issues of social responsibility have in recent decades held a less commanding place in U.S. literature than in the wider world. Social commentary in our art is frequently viewed with suspicion. Its advocacy does not fall within the stated goals of any major North American publisher, endowment, or prize for the arts. The Bellwether Prize was conceived to address this deficiency. We would like to see the place of conscience in our nation's artistic landscape restored to the same high position it holds elsewhere in the world. By means of this prize we hope to enlist North American writers, publishers, and readers to share in this crucial endeavor."

**(2000)** Kathryn Hume, *American Dream, American Nightmare: Fiction Since 1960*: "Around 1960, American Fiction cast aside many canonical limits and became a carnival of bustling diversity. Did the excitement of these developments blind critics to a surprisingly bleak outlook in many of these novels? For all the flash and energy of the narrative voices, a disconcerting amount of the fiction expresses bitter disillusionment with America and the American Dream. This study considers roughly one hundred novels.... Obviously disappointment with America is not found in all novels of the period, nor in all the books by these particular novelists. Writers more concerned with language than story, who locate 'art's deepest morality at the heart of linguistic creativity of which fiction is capable,' and those for whom aesthetics, theory, and philosophy are the burning issues may not feel attracted to political ruminations.... My map of the novelistic landscape since 1960 is not meant to be exhaustive. It explores the surprising expanses of the Slough of Despond rather than focusing on the higher plateaus whose inhabitants pursue their own ends and feel no worry for the state of the country."

**(2002)** B. R. Meyers, *A Reader's Manifesto: An Attack on the Growing Pretentiousness in American Literary Prose*: The book begins with an epigraph: "Those who write preciously are like people who get dolled up to avoid being confused and confounded with the mob, a danger run by no gentleman even in the worst clothes. As a certain sartorial pomp...betrays the plebian, so does a precious style betray the commonplace mind." –Schopenhauer

“In late 1999 I wrote a short book called *Gorgons in the Pool*. Quoting lengthy passages from prize-winning novels, I argued that some of the most acclaimed contemporary prose is the product of mediocre writers availing themselves of trendy stylistic gimmicks. The greater point was that we readers should trust our own taste and perception instead of deferring to received opinion. A banal thing to say? I only wish it was. For the past few decades our cultural establishment has propagated a very different message. The poet Philip Larkin once gave it this sardonic summing-up:”

The terms and arguments vary with the circumstances, but basically the message is: Don't trust your eyes, or ears, or understanding. They'll tell you this is ridiculous, or ugly, or meaningless. Don't believe them. You've got to work at this: after all, you don't expect to understand anything as important as art straight off, do you? I mean, this is pretty complex stuff: if you want to know how complex, I'm giving a course of ninety-six lectures at the local college, starting next week.

(2003) Howard Zinn, *Artists in Times of War*: “I suggest that the role of the artist is to transcend conventional wisdom, to transcend the word of the establishment, to transcend the orthodoxy, to go beyond and escape what is handed down by the government or what is said in the media.... It is the job of the artist to think outside the boundaries of permissible thought and dare to say things that no one else will say.... It is absolutely patriotic to point a finger at the government to say that it is not doing what it should be doing to safeguard the right of citizens to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.... We must be able to look at ourselves, to look at our country honestly and clearly. And just as we can examine the awful things that people do elsewhere, we have to be willing to examine the awful things that are done here by our government.”

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#### Fiction and Politics: Excerpts From Some Recent Articles

(April 6, 2002) John Pilger, “Hollywood Hurrah,” [www.pilger.carlton.com](http://www.pilger.carlton.com)  
“Even in finely crafted films like *The Deer Hunter* and *Platoon* that look as if they might break ranks, there is an implicit oath of loyalty to imperial culture. This was true of *Three Kings*, a movie that seemed to take issue with the Gulf war, but instead produced a familiar ‘bad apple’ tale, exonerating the militarism that is now rampant. So dominant is Hollywood in our lives, and so collusive are its camp-following critics, that the films that ought to have been made are unmentionable. Name the mainstream movies that have shone light on to the vast shadow thrown by the American secret state, and the mayhem for which it is responsible. I can think of only a few...”

(June 26, 2002) John Pilger, “Our Writers' Failure (I),” [www.zmag.org](http://www.zmag.org)  
“Martin Amis represents a problem: that some of the most acclaimed and privileged writers in the English language fail to engage with the most urgent issues of our time. On 1 June, the Guardian published a long essay by Martin Amis, entitled ‘The voice of the lonely crowd’. It was about 11 September and the role of writers. What did Amis think

about on the momentous day? He thought he was ‘like Josephine, the opera-singing mouse in the Kafka story: Sing? “She can’t even squeak.”’ By that he meant, I guess, that he had nothing to say about ‘the conflicts we now face or fear’, as he put it. Why not? Where was the spirit of Orwell and Greene? Where was a modest acknowledgement of history: a passing reflection on the impact of rapacious great power on vulnerable societies, which are the roots of the current ‘terrorism’?”

(July 26, 2002) John Pilger, “Our Writers’ Failure (II),” *New Statesman*

“On 17 June, I wrote about Martin Amis’s recent Guardian essay, ‘The voice of the lonely crowd,’ in which he described the response of acclaimed writers like himself to 11 September as a ‘pitiable babble.’ In fact, they were and remain mostly silent.”

(September 29, 2002) Arundhati Roy, “Come September,” [www.zmag.org](http://www.zmag.org)

“The theme of much of what I write, fiction as well as nonfiction, is the relationship between power and powerlessness and the endless, circular conflict they’re engaged in. John Berger, that most wonderful writer, once wrote: ‘Never again will a single story be told as though it’s the only one.’ There can never be a single story. There are only ways of seeing. So when I tell a story, I tell it not as an ideologue who wants to pit one absolutist ideology against another, but as a story-teller who wants to share her way of seeing. Though it might appear otherwise, my writing is not really about nations and histories; it’s about power. About the paranoia and ruthlessness of power. About the physics of power. I believe that the accumulation of vast unfettered power by a State or a country, a corporation or an institution - or even an individual, a spouse, a friend, a sibling - regardless of ideology, results in excesses such as the ones I will recount here.”

(November 10, 2003) John Pilger, “The Silence of Writers,” [www.zmag.org](http://www.zmag.org)

“For the great writers of the 20th century, art could not be separated from politics. Today, there is a disturbing silence on the dark matters that should command our attention. In 1935, the first Congress of American Writers was held at the Carnegie Hall in New York, followed by another two years later. By one account, 3,500 crammed into the auditorium and a thousand more were turned away. They were electric events, with writers discussing how they could confront ominous events in Abyssinia, China and Spain. Telegrams from Thomas Mann, C Day Lewis, Upton Sinclair and Albert Einstein were read out, reflecting the fear that great power was now rampant and that it had become impossible to discuss art and literature without politics.”

(January 1, 2004) Margo Hammond and Ellen Heltzel, “The Plot Thickens at the New York Times Book Review,” [www.poynter.org](http://www.poynter.org)

“...if you’re perplexed or simply bored with what passes for smart fiction these days, the *Times* feels your pain. More attention will be paid to the potboilers, we’re told... So there’s the recipe: Emphasize non-fiction books. Demote literary fiction. Promote (judiciously) commercial novels... Whether or not the *Times*’ analysis of the market and its readers is correct, it’s based on logical reasoning. In the views expressed by its decision-makers, too few works of fiction rise to the level of a ‘novel of ideas’ — that is, stories that express the concerns and issues of the day as Dickens did.”

(March 8, 2004) Andrew O'Hehir, "'The Fountain at the Center of the World' by Robert Newman," [www.salon.com](http://www.salon.com)

"The anti-globalization movement may not quite have found its Dante or its Homer in British writer Robert Newman, but it's found something, all right -- maybe its Theodore Dreiser. Newman, the author of two previous novels published in the United Kingdom, makes a splashy, messy American debut with 'The Fountain at the Center of the World,' an ambitious and occasionally thrilling book that takes you from a NAFTA-impooverished Mexican village to the sleek corporate hallways of the City of London to the now-legendary street demonstrations at the World Trade Organization's 1999 Seattle meeting. Newman is himself a veteran street-level activist, having worked with such groups as Reclaim the Streets, Indymedia, Earth First! and the longshoremen of Liverpool. He writes about the decentralized, ragtag fringes of the contemporary left with affection and a wry eye for detail..." [Other reviews: *Independent*, *Guardian*, *New York Times*, *Tacoma Tribune*, *Diverse Books*, *American Prospect*, *Texas Observer*.]

(May 27, 2004) Heather Lee Schroeder, "Political fiction inspires thought, debate on issues," *The Capitol Times*, [www.madison.com](http://www.madison.com)

"So much of the fiction that crosses my desk has turned inward to focus on issues of interpersonal relationships. Frankly, I find the endless round of 'coming of age' novels and intensely focused stories about individuals rather boring. If the heart of every story is conflict, then I think the difference between a memorable story and a forgettable story lies in the author's ability to weigh the internal conflicts of the characters against the greater and external struggles of the world around them. Not only does political fiction entertain readers, but it also will bring them to a place they have never been or never dared venture. Great political fiction also can spur them on to learn more or think more about greater social issues. Think, for example, of the enduring popularity of Charles Dickens. His writing was of the moment - relevant and sharply focused on both the struggles of individuals and the larger machine in which they toiled - yet it speaks to us today about all sorts of social ills we're still trying to manage."

(June 30, 2004) Ardain Isma, "Novel Injustices: Whither the Contemporary Novel?" [www.justresponse.net](http://www.justresponse.net)

"Far from romanticizing the Haitian masses' deplorable conditions, Alexis saw in his 'marvelous realism' the best if not a unique way to beautify the Haitian literature, and with it, the 'marvelous symbiosis,' connecting the mind, body and soul of every Haitian in order to bring to light a new and true Haitian nation – one that would be based on justice for all. Alexis saw in the people's daily life an artistic treasure, one not only to preserve and cherish, but also to be put at the forefront of the struggle to bring humanity together within the framework of democratic governance and the rule of law."

(October 1, 2004) Ira Chernus, "Presidential Fiction: The Story Behind the Debates," [www.tomdispatch.com](http://www.tomdispatch.com)

"For most of human history, most people have lived in abject poverty. They survived, in part, on stories. They told stories to interpret their suffering or to distract themselves from their suffering, to participate vicariously in magnificent events and give meaning to an

existence that might otherwise seem meaningless. In most cultures, the truly powerful stories -- myths, legends, or sacred narratives -- were religious ones. In the United States, where we have no religious myths that we all share, the history of the nation has become our most powerful shared myth. Like all religious stories, the most popular versions of American history are a mixture of fact, fantasy, and wish-fulfillment. Judging from the first debate, it's not clear that Kerry and his campaign strategists understand the power of this potent brew. The Bush campaign understands it all too well."

(October 10, 2004) Fred Kaplan, "Truth Stranger than 'Strangelove'," *New York Times*  
"Dr. Strangelove,' Stanley Kubrick's 1964 film about nuclear-war plans run amok, is widely heralded as one of the greatest satires in American political or movie history. For its 40th anniversary, Film Forum is screening a new 35 millimeter print for one week, starting on Friday, and Columbia TriStar is releasing a two-disc special-edition DVD next month. One essential point should emerge from all the hoopla: 'Strangelove' is far more than a satire. In its own loopy way, the movie is a remarkably fact-based and specific guide to some of the oddest, most secretive chapters of the Cold War.... Those in the know watched 'Dr. Strangelove' amused, like everyone else, but also stunned. Daniel Ellsberg, who later leaked the Pentagon Papers, was a RAND analyst and a consultant at the Defense Department when he and a mid-level official took off work one afternoon in 1964 to see the film. Mr. Ellsberg recently recalled that as they left the theater, he turned to his colleague and said, 'That was a documentary!'"

(2004) Larry Beinhart, "Politics & Mysteries," [www.thelibrarian.biz](http://www.thelibrarian.biz) [author of political thriller novels *The Librarian* and *American Hero* (filmed as *Wag the Dog*)]  
"In a mystery (and all the sub-genres) crime is personal. Hands on. Painful. It has blood and consequences. If some distant and cool and impersonal act of policy impels the criminal act, that allows us, the readers, to make the translation from the institutional to the personal. Politics offers us something real and vital for the story to be about. The story, ideally, takes us past the rhetoric and the posturing, to the reality of the politics. A great symbiosis. That explains why lots and lots of writers would combine politics and mysteries. But they don't. Even when they do, it's rarely about politics as policy. It's mostly politics as a setting... Fiction, specifically mystery fiction, is the tool that I have available to me to talk about unreality of our public mythologies."

(2004) Underground Literary Alliance, [www.literaryrevolution.com](http://www.literaryrevolution.com): "American fiction should be something relevant to American people's lives, instead of the lame, overly-wrought, navel-gazing crap that the congloms make sure gets first-rate display at your local chain bookshop.... Our main criticism is that American Lit 'n' Letters has become professionalized, elitist, art-destructive, corrupt, meaningless, soulless, and just plain crazy sick to look at. This has everything to do with the strangulation since the '90s of independent publishing houses (and, to a big extent, more independent thought) by conglomerates. Basically: it's corporate lit from here on out unless somebody does something about it. We of the ULA are out here doing something about it. We're activists of the aesthetic variety. We want to provoke cultural change against its current tide towards the focal points of power and capital concentration. We're screaming for systemic change now."

*(November 12, 2004)* Andre Vltchek, “Are We Alone, Arundhati Roy?” [www.zmag.org](http://www.zmag.org)  
“Two years ago...[Arundhati Roy and I] discussed politics and we discussed mounting problems in India, but we also talked about the state of literature, topic about which we both felt passionate. We almost all great modern writers seemed to be in lethargic sleep or too frightened to address important global issues. Or maybe there were almost no great writers left. Philosophy, politics, social criticism and vision were replaced by frivolous, entertaining plots. Pitiful state of today’s world; its disparities and scandalous post-colonial arrangement topped the list of some of the issues hardly discussed on the pages of contemporary novels. Fiction became politically and socially detached and therefore historically and morally irrelevant. Instead of aiming at retaining their status as ‘the conscience of society’, most of the writers opted for much more modest goals, turning themselves to entertainers and showbiz figures.”