

☐ Contemporary
Literary Criticism

CLC

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Volume 57

Contemporary Literary Criticism

Excerpts from Criticism of the
Works of Today's Novelists, Poets,
Playwrights, Short Story Writers, Scriptwriters,
and Other Creative Writers



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Library of Congress Catalog Card Number 76-38938

ISBN 0-8103-4431-9

ISSN 0091-3421

Printed in the United States of America.

Published simultaneously in the United Kingdom
by Gale Research International Limited
(An affiliated company of Gale Research Inc.)

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3

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Preface

Literary criticism is, by definition, “the art of evaluating or analyzing with knowledge and propriety works of literature.” The complexity and variety of contemporary literature makes the function of the critic especially important to today’s reader. The critic assists the reader in identifying significant new writers, recognizing trends, understanding the importance and implications of particular works, and mastering new terminology. Until the publication of the first volume of *Contemporary Literary Criticism (CLC)* in 1973, there existed no ongoing digest monitoring scholarly and popular sources of critical opinion and explication. *CLC*, therefore, has fulfilled an essential need.

Scope of the Work

CLC presents significant passages from published criticism of works by today’s creative writers. Each volume of *CLC* includes excerpted criticism on about thirty authors who are now living or who died after December 31, 1959. More than 2,000 authors have been included since the series began publication. Since many of the writers covered by *CLC* inspire continual critical commentary, authors frequently appear in more than one volume. There is, of course, no duplication of reprinted criticism.

Authors are selected for inclusion for a variety of reasons, among them the publication or dramatic production of a critically acclaimed new work, the reception of a major literary award, revival of interest in past writings, or the dramatization of a literary work as a film or television screenplay. For example, the present volume includes John Krizanc and Robert Kroetsch, recipients of Canada’s Governor General’s Literary Award; André Malraux, an influential force in contemporary French art, politics, and philosophy; and Isabel Allende and Bruce Chatwin, whose recent novels, *Eva Luna* and *Utz*, respectively, received much attention from critics and readers. Perhaps most importantly, works that frequently appear on the syllabuses of high school and college literature classes are represented by individual entries in *CLC*; *Waiting for Godot*, by Samuel Beckett, and *The Waste Land*, by T. S. Eliot, are examples of works of this stature covered in the present volume. Attention is also given to several other groups of writers—authors of considerable public interest—about whose work criticism is often difficult to locate. These include mystery and science fiction writers, literary and social critics, foreign writers, and authors who represent particular ethnic groups in the United States.

Format of the Book

Altogether there are about 500 individual excerpts in each volume—with approximately seventeen excerpts per author—taken from hundreds of book review periodicals, general magazines, scholarly journals, monographs, and books. Entries include critical evaluations spanning from the beginning of an author’s career to the most current commentary. Interviews, feature articles, and other published writings that offer insight into the authors works are also presented. Emphasis has been placed on expanding the sources for criticism by including an increasing number of scholarly and specialized periodicals. Students, teachers, librarians, and researchers will find that the generous excerpts and supplementary material provided by *CLC* supply them with vital information needed to write a term paper, analyze a poem, or lead a book discussion group. In addition, complete bibliographical citations facilitate the location of the original source and provide all of the information necessary for a term paper footnote or bibliography.

A *CLC* author entry consists of the following elements:

- The **author heading** cites the author’s full name, followed by birth date, and death date when applicable. The portion of the name outside parentheses denotes the form under which the author has most commonly published. If an author has written consistently under a pseudonym, the pseudonym will be listed in the author heading and the real name given on the first line of the biographical and critical introduction. Also located at the beginning of the introduction to the author entry are any important name variations under which an author has written. Uncertainty as to a birth or death date is indicated by question marks.
- A **portrait** of the author is included when available.

- A brief **biographical and critical introduction** to the author and his or her work precedes the excerpted criticism. However, *CLC* is not intended to be a definitive biographical source. Therefore, *cross-references* have been included to direct readers to these useful sources published by Gale Research: *Contemporary Authors*, which includes detailed biographical and bibliographical sketches of more than 92,000 authors; *Children's Literature Review*, which presents excerpted criticism on the works of authors of children's books; *Something about the Author*, which contains heavily illustrated biographical sketches of writers and illustrators who create books for children and young adults; *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, which provides original evaluations and detailed biographies of authors important to literary history; *Contemporary Authors Autobiography Series*, which offers autobiographical essays by prominent writers; and *Something about the Author Autobiography Series*, which presents autobiographical essays by authors of interest to young readers. Previous volumes of *CLC* in which the author has been featured are also listed in the introduction.

- The **excerpted criticism** represents various kinds of critical writing, ranging in form from the brief review to the scholarly exegesis. Essays are selected by the editors to reflect the spectrum of opinion about a specific work or about an author's literary career in general. The excerpts are presented chronologically, adding a useful perspective to the entry. All titles by the author featured in the entry are printed in boldface type, which enables the reader to easily identify the works being discussed. Publication information (such as publisher names and book prices) and parenthetical numerical references (such as footnotes or page and line references to specific editions of a work) have been deleted at the editors' discretion to provide smoother reading of the text.

- A complete **bibliographical citation** designed to help the user find the original essay or book follows each excerpt.

Other Features

- A list of **Authors Forthcoming in *CLC*** previews the authors to be researched for future volumes.

- An **Acknowledgments** section lists the copyright holders who have granted permission to reprint material in this volume of *CLC*. It does not, however, list every book or periodical reprinted or consulted during the preparation of the volume.

- A **Cumulative Author Index** lists all the authors who have appeared in *CLC*, *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism*, *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism*, *Literature Criticism from 1400 to 1800*, *Classical and Medieval Literature Criticism*, and *Short Story Criticism*, with cross-references to these Gale series: *Children's Literature Review*, *Contemporary Authors*, *Contemporary Authors Autobiography Series*, *Contemporary Authors Bibliographical Series*, *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, *Something about the Author*, *Something about the Author Autobiography Series*, *Yesterday's Authors of Books for Children*, and *Authors & Artists for Young Adults*. Readers will welcome this cumulated author index as a useful tool for locating an author within the various series. The index, which lists birth and death dates when available, will be particularly valuable for those authors who are identified with a certain period but whose death date causes them to be placed in another, or for those authors whose careers span two periods. For example, Ernest Hemingway is found in *CLC*, yet a writer often associated with him, F. Scott Fitzgerald, is found in *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism*.

- A **Cumulative Nationality Index** alphabetically lists all authors featured in *CLC* by nationality, followed by numbers corresponding to the volumes in which they appear.

- A **Title Index** alphabetically lists all titles reviewed in the current volume of *CLC* followed by author's name and the corresponding page numbers where they are discussed. English translations of foreign titles and variations of titles are cross-referenced to the title under which a work was originally published. Titles of novels, novellas, dramas, films, record albums, and poetry, short story, and essay collections are printed in italics, while all individual poems, short stories, essays, and songs are printed in roman type within quotation marks; when published separately (e.g., T.S. Eliot's poem *The Waste Land*), the title will also be printed in italics.

- In response to numerous suggestions from librarians, Gale has also produced a **special paperbound edition** of the *CLC* title index. This annual cumulation, which alphabetically lists all titles reviewed in the

series, is available to all customers and will be published with the first volume of *CLC* issued in each calendar year. Additional copies of the index are available upon request. Librarians and patrons will welcome this separate index: it saves shelf space, is easily disposable upon receipt of the following year's cumulation, and is easy to use.

Suggestions Are Welcome

The editors welcome the comments and suggestions of readers to expand the coverage and enhance the usefulness of the series. Please feel free to contact us by letter or by calling our toll-free number: 1-800-347-GALE.

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Authors Forthcoming in *CLC*

Contemporary Literary Criticism, Vol. 59: Yearbook 1989 will be devoted to an examination of the outstanding achievements and trends in literature during 1989. Along with entries on major new writers, prizewinners, and notable authors who died during the year, *CLC-59* will feature commentary on literary events and issues that generated extensive public interest and media coverage. Volumes 58 and 60 will contain a number of authors not previously covered as well as criticism on newer works by authors included in earlier volumes.

To Be Included in Volume 58

Fernando Arrabal (Moroccan dramatist and novelist)—Influenced by the Surrealist movement, Arrabal is best known for his macabre plays written in the tradition of the Theater of the Absurd. His works often examine human brutality and sexuality through the perspectives of children.

Cyrus Colter (American novelist and short story writer)—In his fiction, Colter attempts to bridge the gap he perceives between the experiences of black Americans and the ways in which they have been represented in literature. His deterministic plots emphasize the universality of his middle-class characters and their problems with loneliness, alienation, guilt, and communication.

Douglas Crase (American poet and critic)—A poet whose first collection, *The Revisionist*, earned high praise, Crase focuses upon the American landscape and such concerns as history and ecology. Critics often compare Crase's bold style to those of Wallace Stevens and Walt Whitman.

William Golding (English novelist and short story writer)—Winner of the 1983 Nobel Prize in literature, Golding is best known for his novel *The Lord of the Flies*. Commentary in his entry will focus on this allegorical work, which is widely regarded as a powerful psychological and sociological fable about the primal savagery underlying civilized behavior.

Chester Himes (American short story writer and novelist)—Perhaps best known for *Cotton Comes to Harlem*, one in a series of highly regarded detective novels set in New York that combine irony with biting humor, Himes is considered a valuable contributor to the American tradition of black protest fiction for his vehement portraits of racial oppression and black resistance.

Joyce Johnson (American novelist, short story writer, and autobiographer)—In her fic-

tion, Johnson often relates her involvement with various members of the 1950s Beat generation, providing a rare female perspective on the era and movement. *Minor Characters*, a revealing, candid memoir of her romance with Jack Kerouac, won the National Book Critics Circle Award.

Maxine Hong Kingston (American autobiographer, short story writer, and novelist)—In her memoirs, Kingston blends myth, legend, and history to examine her dual heritage as a Chinese American. Kingston's entry will include commentary on *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood among Ghosts*, a standard text in women's studies courses, as well as *Tripmaster Monkey*, her recent first novel.

Michael Moorcock (English novelist and editor)—Moorcock is associated with the British "New Wave" literary movement of the 1960s that introduced experimental techniques and a wider range of subject matter to fantasy and science fiction literature.

Christopher Nolan (Irish poet, short story writer, and autobiographer)—Nolan won wide acclaim for his first collection of poetry, *Dam Burst of Dreams*, and his autobiographical work, *Under the Eye of the Clock*. Nolan often describes his experiences as a paralyzed mute in an exhilarating prose style, which has been compared to that of James Joyce for its use of Celtic-styled alliteration and invented words.

Alice Walker (American novelist, poet, and essayist)—Regarded as an important chronicler of African-American life, Walker is best known for her novel *The Color Purple*, for which she received the Pulitzer Prize in fiction. Commentary in this entry will focus on Walker's recent novel, *The Temple of My Familiar*, which concerns the multiple lives of a reincarnated woman.

Douglas Adams (English novelist)—In his popular series of satirical novels beginning with *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, Adams uses the devices of science fiction to lampoon modern culture. Adams blends slapstick and fantasy in his recent novels, *Dirk Gently's Holistic Detective Agency* and *The Long Dark Tea Time of the Soul*, to portray the unusual adventures of a private investigator.

Erskine Caldwell (American novelist and short story writer)—The author of such controversial Depression era novels as *Tobacco Road* and *God's Little Acre*, Caldwell blended realism and comic pathos in his work to portray the desperate existence of poor Southerners.

Annie Dillard (American essayist and poet)—Dillard is best known for *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, her Pulitzer Prize-winning meditation on nature that critics have compared to Henry David Thoreau's *Walden*. She has also earned praise for her works of literary criticism, poetry, and autobiography.

Umberto Eco (Italian novelist and semiotician)—Acclaimed for his international best-seller *The Name of the Rose*, Eco has generated widespread interest with his recent mystery novel, *Foucault's Pendulum*. Spanning several centuries and exploring the nature of language and words, this work combines intrigue, autobiography, political commentary, and esoteric motifs.

Carlos Fuentes (Mexican novelist and essayist)—In his internationally acclaimed works, Fuentes often employs myth, legend, and history to examine Mexico's past and contemporary social and cultural issues. This entry will focus on his

recent novel, *Christopher Unborn*, and *Myself with Others: Selected Essays*.

Shirley Jackson (American novelist and short story writer)—A prolific author, Jackson is generally known for such Gothic horror tales as "The Lottery" and *The Haunting of Hill House*. In lucid prose juxtaposing humor with intense psychological states and an atmosphere of foreboding, Jackson explores the dark side of human nature.

Harper Lee (American novelist)—Lee's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*, which examines racial attitudes in the Deep South through the experiences of a young girl in a small Alabama town, will be the focus of this entry.

Anaïs Nin (French-born American diarist, novelist, and short story writer)—Nin is best known for the erotic pieces she wrote during the 1930s and 1940s and for her numerous books containing excerpts from her diaries. This entry will emphasize recent analyses of her work.

Molly Peacock (American poet)—In such collections as *Raw Heaven* and *Take Heart*, Peacock uses humor, unusual rhyme schemes, and contemplative tones to examine sexuality.

Kurt Vonnegut (American novelist and short story writer)—Widely regarded as a masterful contemporary writer, Vonnegut uses satire, irony, and iconoclastic humor to explore social values and the meaning of life. This entry will focus on *Slaughterhouse-Five; or, The Children's Crusade*, Vonnegut's absurdist novel about his experiences as a prisoner of war during the firebombing of Dresden, Germany, in World War II.

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