

☐ Contemporary  
Literary Criticism

**CLC**

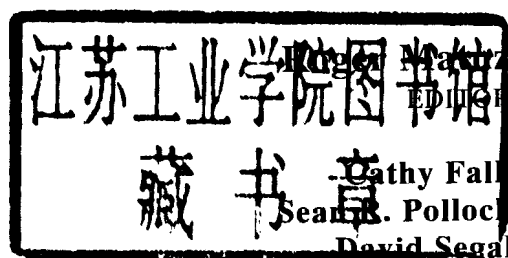
**58**



Volume 58

# 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 0-8103-4432-7

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.)

# Contemporary Literary Criticism

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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 Alice Walker and Maxine Hong Kingston, whose recent novels, *The Temple of My Familiar* and *Tripmaster Monkey*, respectively, received much attention from critics and whose works are frequently discussed in Women’s Studies courses; Harold Pinter, a major contemporary dramatist whose recent plays, *One for the Road* and *Mountain Language*, represent his deeper concern for political themes; and Václav Havel, a leading Czechoslovakian dramatist and dissident who endured years of harrassment and imprisonment by Communist officials before being elected President of his native land in 1989. Perhaps most importantly, works that frequently appear on the syllabuses of high school and college literature classes are represented by individual entries in *CLC*; *Lord of the Flies*, by William Golding, and *In Cold Blood*, by Truman Capote, 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 author’s works are also presented. 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 form under which the author has most commonly published, followed by birth date, and death date when applicable. Uncertainty as to a birth or death date is indicated by a question mark.
- 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. The first line of the introduction provides the author’s full name, pseudonyms (if applicable),

nationality, and a listing of genres in which the author has written. Since *CLC* is not intended to be a definitive biographical source, *cross-references* have been included to direct readers to these useful sources published by Gale Research: *Short Story Criticism*, which provides excerpts of criticism on the works of short story writers; *Contemporary Authors*, which includes detailed biographical and bibliographical sketches of nearly 95,000 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*. Listings are followed by the author's name and the corresponding page numbers where the titles 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 easy to use, and is disposable upon receipt of the following year's cumulation.

#### **A Note to the Reader**

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume in the Literary Criticism Series may use the following general forms to footnote reprinted criticism. The first example pertains to material drawn from periodicals, the second to material reprinted from books:

<sup>1</sup>Anne Tyler, "Manic Monologue," *The New Republic* 200 (April 17, 1989), 44-6; excerpted and reprinted in *Contemporary Literary Criticism*, Vol. 58, ed. Roger Matuz (Detroit: Gale Research, 1990), p. 278.

<sup>2</sup>Patrick Reilly, *The Literature of Guilt: From 'Gulliver' to Golding* (University of Iowa Press, 1988); excerpted and reprinted in *Contemporary Literary Criticism*, Vol. 58, ed. Roger Matuz (Detroit: Gale Research, 1990), pp. 153-60.

#### **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 60 and 61 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 60

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.

Ersine 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 family bonds, love, and 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.

## To Be Included in Volume 61

Nicholson Baker (American novelist)—Baker has received critical praise for his debut novel, *The Mezzanine*, a contemplative, detail-oriented work in which an escalator ride inspires revelations on the unexamined, seemingly trivial aspects of daily life.

Malcolm Bradbury (English novelist and critic)—A prolific author, Bradbury writes satirical novels about British and American university life in which he examines themes of social dislocation and liberalism.

Gillian Clarke (Welsh poet)—Considered an important new voice in contemporary Welsh poetry, Clarke utilizes traditional Celtic metrics that resonate throughout her primarily meditative verse. Clarke often employs these subtle sound and rhythmic patterns to explore the nature of female experience.

Maria Irene Fornés (Cuban-born American dramatist)—Winner of six Obie awards, Fornés is a leading off-Broadway dramatist. Although unconventional, her humorous, intelligent plays reflect such traditional concerns as human relationships and social and political corruption.

Larry Gelbart (American scriptwriter and dramatist)—Chief writer for the first five years of the television series “M\*A\*S\*H,” Gelbart has recently garnered praise for his comic plays *Mastergate*, a satire on the Iran-Contra scandal, and *City of Angels*, a parody of 1940s detective films.

Ernest Hemingway (American novelist and short story writer)—Recognized as one of the preeminent American authors of the twentieth century, Hemingway wrote powerful, terse narratives of disillusionment, personal loss, and stoic resolve in

the face of an apparently meaningless world. Critical commentary in Hemingway’s entry will focus upon his acclaimed novel, *The Sun Also Rises*.

Zora Neale Hurston (American novelist and short story writer)—Regarded as an important writer of the Harlem Renaissance, Hurston is respected for works that provide insights into black culture and the human condition. Hurston’s entry will focus on her novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, which is enjoying renewed popularity through Women’s Studies courses.

Jack Kerouac (American novelist)—Kerouac was a key figure in the artistic and cultural phenomenon known as the Beat Movement. This entry will focus on his novel *On the Road*, considered a quintessential work of Beat literature for its experimental form and its portrayal of a rebellious, hedonistic lifestyle.

Stephen King (American novelist and short story writer)—King is a prolific and popular author of horror fiction. Non-supernatural in emphasis, King’s recent novels include *Misery*, in which a best-selling writer is held captive by a psychotic nurse, and *The Dark Half*, about a pseudonymous author attempting to shed his false persona who finds that his submerged alter-ego seeks revenge.

George F. Walker (Canadian dramatist)—Closely associated with the Factory Theatre, a group that promotes alternative drama in Toronto, Walker writes social satires in which he employs black humor and a variety of unconventional theatrical devices. His recent play, *Nothing Sacred*, for which Walker received his second Governor General’s Award, was popular in regional theaters in the United States and Canada.

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# Fernando Arrabal

1932-

(Born Fernando Arrabal Terán) Moroccan-born Spanish dramatist, novelist, scriptwriter, and poet.

A controversial Spanish playwright whose works are primarily produced in French, Arrabal is often associated with the Theatre of the Absurd, an experimental dramatic movement typified by black humor and often surreal portraits of the human condition. Preoccupied with memories of personal and political upheavals experienced during the Spanish Civil War, Arrabal attacks governmental, religious, and psychological restrictions upon freedom. His nightmarish dramas, which abound with violent, scatological and sadomasochistic images, have been variously condemned as obscene, blasphemous, and misogynic. Nevertheless, Arrabal has garnered critical accolades for his meticulously realized, highly original vision of morality in a dehumanized, technological age. Allen Thiher observed: "Arrabal's obsessive fantasies have given rise to a body of work that is among the most promising of the New Theater. With the modernity of a happening and the courage to face the delirium of our times, it may well come to be among the most significant in this second half of the twentieth century."



Arrabal was born in Spanish Morocco to a highly conservative Catholic mother and a politically liberal father. In 1936, Arrabal's father, an army officer, was arrested and sentenced to prison for thirty years after refusing to join the forces of Generalissimo Francisco Franco in the Spanish Civil War. Eight years later, after allegedly becoming insane, he escaped from the prison's psychiatric ward and disappeared. Humiliated by her husband's actions at the time of his arrest, Arrabal's mother informed her children that their father had died, then attempted to eradicate all memories of him by burning his papers and excising his image from photographs. However, at seventeen, Arrabal became aware of his mother's deception after discovering a trunk containing letters and documents belonging to his father. Commentators contend that this traumatic event coupled with his disturbing experiences as a strictly disciplined Jesuit school student in fascist Spain fostered in the playwright the rebelliousness and sadomasochistic sensuality that permeate his work. In his first novel, *Baal Babylone* (1959), later adapted for the screen as *Viva la muerte* (1970), Arrabal recreates his early experiences. The protagonist, a child during the Spanish Civil War, relies on memories of his absent father to escape his oppressive mother, whom he believes denounced her husband to authorities.

Arrabal's early plays feature adults whose childish innocence is frequently compared to Charlie Chaplin's tragicomic characters. These amoral individuals, according to Martin Esslin, "are often cruel because they have failed to understand, or even to notice, the existence of a moral law; and, like children, they suffer the cruelty of the world as a meaningless affliction." In Arrabal's first play, *Los soldados* (1952; *Pique-nique en Campagne*), the parents of a naive soldier travel to a battlefield for a picnic. However, after cordially inviting a captured enemy soldier to join them, the entire party is abruptly killed by machine-gun fire. Like most of Arrabal's dramatic works, this play is best known in its French transla-

tion. In the opening scene of *Fando et Lis* (1955), Fando pushes his paralyzed lover Lis in a baby carriage on the road to the mythical city of Tar. While Fando displays his love for Lis by playing for her on his drum, he also torments her: he undresses her before four "gentlemen," then leaves her exposed on the road throughout the night. The next morning, after being placed in chains by Fando, Lis accidentally breaks her lover's drum. Enraged, Fando beats Lis to death, then continues to Tar with the four gentlemen. *Le Cimetière des Voitures* (1957) recreates the passion of Jesus Christ in a squalid automobile graveyard populated by vagrants and prostitutes. In the play, Emanou, a trumpet-playing Christ-figure, desires to be virtuous, but has only memorized a rote creed concerning goodness. After illegally performing for the other junkyard inhabitants, Emanou is betrayed with a kiss by his friend Topé, then crucified on the handlebars of a bicycle by two policemen.

In other dramas, Arrabal associates the arbitrary cruelty of the state as portrayed in *Los soldados*, *Le Cimetière des Voitures*, and *Guernica* (1959), a later play, with the exercise of familial authority through the image of a sadistic mother. In *Le Deux Bourreaux* (1956), for example, a woman conspires with her eldest son to win the support of his rebellious younger brother after betraying their father to the authorities.