

☐ Contemporary
Literary Criticism

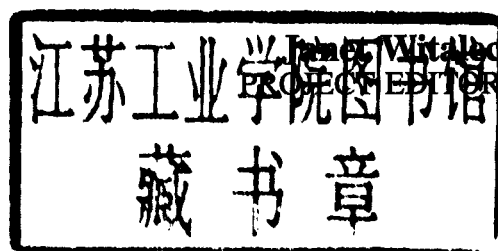
CLC

174

Volume 174

Contemporary Literary Criticism

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



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Contemporary Literary Criticism, Vol. 174

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Preface

Named “one of the twenty-five most distinguished reference titles published during the past twenty-five years” by *Reference Quarterly*, the *Contemporary Literary Criticism (CLC)* series provides readers with critical commentary and general information on more than 2,000 authors now living or who died after December 31, 1999. Volumes published from 1973 through 1999 include authors who died after December 31, 1959. Previous to the publication of the first volume of *CLC* in 1973, there was no ongoing digest monitoring scholarly and popular sources of critical opinion and explication of modern literature. *CLC*, therefore, has fulfilled an essential need, particularly since the complexity and variety of contemporary literature makes the function of criticism especially important to today’s reader.

Scope of the Series

CLC provides significant passages from published criticism of works by creative writers. Since many of the authors covered in *CLC* inspire continual critical commentary, writers are often represented 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 adaptation of a literary work to film or television.

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 authors, and authors who represent particular ethnic groups.

Each *CLC* volume contains individual essays and reviews 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 general critical and biographical material in *CLC* provides them with vital information required to write a term paper, analyze a poem, or lead a book discussion group. In addition, complete biographical citations note the original source and all of the information necessary for a term paper footnote or bibliography.

Organization of the Book

A *CLC* entry consists of the following elements:

- The **Author Heading** cites the name under which the author most commonly wrote, followed by birth and death dates. Also located here are any name variations under which an author wrote, including transliterated forms for authors whose native languages use nonroman alphabets. If the author wrote consistently under a pseudonym, the pseudonym will be listed in the author heading and the author’s actual name given in parenthesis on the first line of the biographical and critical information. Uncertain birth or death dates are indicated by question marks. Single-work entries are preceded by a heading that consists of the most common form of the title in English translation (if applicable) and the original date of composition.
- A **Portrait of the Author** is included when available.
- The **Introduction** contains background information that introduces the reader to the author, work, or topic that is the subject of the entry.

- The list of **Principal Works** is ordered chronologically by date of first publication and lists the most important works by the author. The genre and publication date of each work is given. In the case of foreign authors whose works have been translated into English, the English-language version of the title follows in brackets. Unless otherwise indicated, dramas are dated by first performance, not first publication.
- Reprinted **Criticism** is arranged chronologically in each entry to provide a useful perspective on changes in critical evaluation over time. The critic's name and the date of composition or publication of the critical work are given at the beginning of each piece of criticism. Unsigned criticism is preceded by the title of the source in which it appeared. All titles by the author featured in the text are printed in boldface type. Footnotes are reprinted at the end of each essay or excerpt. In the case of excerpted criticism, only those footnotes that pertain to the excerpted texts are included.
- A complete **Bibliographical Citation** of the original essay or book precedes each piece of criticism. Source citations in the Literary Criticism Series follow University of Chicago Press style, as outlined in *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 14th ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993).
- Critical essays are prefaced by brief **Annotations** explicating each piece.
- Whenever possible, a recent **Author Interview** accompanies each entry.
- An annotated bibliography of **Further Reading** appears at the end of each entry and suggests resources for additional study. In some cases, significant essays for which the editors could not obtain reprint rights are included here. Boxed material following the further reading list provides references to other biographical and critical sources on the author in series published by Gale.

Indexes

A **Cumulative Author Index** lists all of the authors that appear in a wide variety of reference sources published by the Gale Group, including *CLC*. A complete list of these sources is found facing the first page of the Author Index. The index also includes birth and death dates and cross references between pseudonyms and actual names.

A **Cumulative Nationality Index** lists all authors featured in *CLC* by nationality, followed by the number of the *CLC* volume in which their entry appears.

A **Cumulative Topic Index** lists the literary themes and topics treated in the series as well as in *Literature Criticism from 1400 to 1800*, *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism*, *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism*, and the *Contemporary Literary Criticism Yearbook*, which was discontinued in 1998.

An alphabetical **Title Index** accompanies each volume of *CLC*. Listings of titles by authors covered in the given volume 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, dramas, nonfiction books, and poetry, short story, or essay collections are printed in italics, while individual poems, short stories, and essays are printed in roman type within quotation marks.

In response to numerous suggestions from librarians, Gale also produces an annual cumulative title index that alphabetically lists all titles reviewed in *CLC* and is available to all customers. Additional copies of this index are available upon request. Librarians and patrons will welcome this separate index; it saves shelf space, is easy to use, and is recyclable upon receipt of the next edition.

Citing *Contemporary Literary Criticism*

When citing criticism reprinted in the Literary Criticism Series, students should provide complete bibliographic information so that the cited essay can be located in the original print or electronic source. Students who quote directly from reprinted criticism may use any accepted bibliographic format, such as University of Chicago Press style or Modern Language As-

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Literature in Response to the September 11 Attacks

Books, poems, essays, plays, and articles in response to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.

INTRODUCTION

On September 11, 2001, the United States sustained the most intense terrorist attack in its history. Two jet airliners crashed into the twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York City, followed shortly thereafter with a third plane crashing into the Pentagon in Washington, D.C. A fourth plane went down in a remote area of Pennsylvania—it is believed that it was headed for the White House. In all, over 4,000 people died in the attacks, including hundreds who were in the buildings and airliners themselves, as well as many of the firefighters, police officers, and other emergency personnel who tried to come to the aid of the victims. It is believed that the attacks were sponsored by al-Qaeda, an extremist Islamic terrorist organization led by a man named Osama bin Laden.

As the United States tried to recover from its losses, many journalists, writers, poets, artists, and survivors responded to the tragedy in their own words, with articles, books, columns, and more. The following criticism provides an overview of those responses, as well as a selection of essays addressing the importance and need for literature in times of tragedy and despair.

REPRESENTATIVE WORKS

Tariq Ali
The Clash of Fundamentalisms: Crusades, Jihads, and Modernity (nonfiction) 2002

Ulrich Baer, editor
110 Stories: New York Writes after September 11 (short stories and poetry) 2002

Jean Baudrillard
The Spirit of Terrorism and Requiem for the Twin Towers (criticism) 2002

Lisa Beamer and Ken Abraham
Let's Roll: Ordinary People, Extraordinary Courage (biography) 2002

Richard Bernstein and the Staff of the *New York Times*
Out of the Blue: A Narrative of September 11, 2001 (journalism) 2002

Leslie Bramm
Lovers Leapt (play) 2002

Roger Burbach and Ben Clarke, editors
September 11 and the U.S. War: Beyond the Curtain of Smoke (essays) 2002

CBS News
What We Saw: The Events of September 11, 2001—In Words, Pictures, and Video (nonfiction, photography, and documentary film) 2002

Noam Chomsky
9-11 (criticism) 2001

David Cole and James X. Dempsey
Terrorism and the Constitution: Sacrificing Civil Liberties in the Name of National Security (criticism) 2002

Betty Jean Craige and Marjorie Agosín, editors
To Mend the World: Women Reflect on 9/11 (essays) 2002

Dayna Curry, Heather Mercer, and Stacy Mattingly
Prisoners of Hope: The Story of Our Captivity and Freedom in Afghanistan (autobiography) 2002

Alan M. Dershowitz
Why Terrorism Works: Understanding the Threat, Responding to the Challenge (nonfiction) 2002

Mitchell Fink and Lois Mathias
Never Forget: An Oral History of September 11, 2001 (interviews) 2002

Bill Gertz
Breakdown: How America's Intelligence Failures Led to September 11 (nonfiction) 2002

Danny Goldberg, Victor Goldberg, and Robert Greenwald, editors
It's a Free Country: Personal Freedom in America after September 11 (essays, interviews, poetry, and political cartoons) 2002

David Halberstam
Firehouse (biography) 2002

Victor David Hanson

An Autumn of War: What America Learned from September 11 and the War on Terrorism (essays) 2002

HarperCollins

In the Line of Duty: A Tribute to New York's Finest and Bravest (nonfiction and photography) 2001

Katrina Vanden Heuvel, editor

A Just Response: The Nation on Terrorism, Democracy, and September 11, 2001 (journalism) 2002

William Heyen, editor

September 11, 2001: American Writers Respond (essays, short stories, and poetry) 2002

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Poetry after 9/11: An Anthology of New York Poets (poetry) 2002

Maira Kalman

Fireboat (juvenilia) 2002

William Langewiesche

American Ground: Unbuilding the World Trade Center (nonfiction) 2002

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Editors of *Life Magazine*

One Nation: America Remembers September 11 (nonfiction) 2002

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Among the Heroes: United Flight 93 and the Passengers and Crew Who Fought Back (biography) 2002

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Love, Greg and Lauren (diaries) 2002

Jeff Meyers, editor

September 11: West Coast Writers Approach Ground Zero (essays and poetry) 2002

Dean E. Murphy, editor

September 11: An Oral History (interviews) 2002

Anne Nelson

The Guys (play) 2002

Photographers for the New York City Police Department

Above Hallowed Ground: A Photographic Record of September 11, 2001 (nonfiction and photography) 2002

Editors of *New York Magazine*

September 11, 2001: A Record of Tragedy, Heroism, and Hope (nonfiction and photography) 2002

Staff of the *New York Times*

Portraits: 9/11/01 (nonfiction and photography) 2001

Richard Picciotto and Daniel Paisner

Last Man Down: A New York City Fire Chief and the Collapse of the World Trade Center (autobiography) 2002

Eugene Richards and Janine Altongy

Stepping through the Ashes (interviews and photography) 2002

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MAJOR WORKS ABOUT SEPTEMBER 11, 2001

David Edwards (review date February 2002)

SOURCE: Edwards, David. Review of 9-11, by Noam Chomsky. *Ecologist* 32, no. 1 (February 2002): 69-70.

[In the following review, Edwards presents an overview of Noam Chomsky's central arguments in 9-11.]

'Ha ha ha to the pacifists', wrote Christopher Hitchens in November, as Kabul fell to the combined might of US bombers, the Northern Alliance, and the BBC's, 'Simpson of Kabul'. Two months later, the victory celebrations continue tirelessly (almost maniacally), as the 'first virtual war' draws to a close. It was 'an instant, foolproof, bloodless recipe, like Delia Smith for bombers', crowed the *Observer's* Mary Riddell, demonstrating due respect for the untold numbers of civilian victims incinerated by US bombs and starving to death in the frozen hills of Afghanistan.

But, once again, history will not end here. And, as Noam Chomsky makes clear in [9-11, a] tiny, essential book of interviews, history is sure to swallow the vapid cries of 'Victory!' in its vast and bloody maw.

The folly of the course on which we are set is hidden from the public by years of suppression and omission of embarrassing truth. First, there is the sheer scale and depth of the hatred ranged against the US and its allies. In mid-1979, President Carter's National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski began secret support for the Mujahadin—later to become the bin Laden network—fighting against the government of Afghanistan. The objective was to draw the Soviet Union into an 'Afghan trap', Brzezinski boasts. The US and its allies assembled a huge mercenary force, 100,000 or more, powerfully armed by the CIA, and drawn from the most militant sectors of radical Islamists.

By 1989, these radical Islamists had succeeded in their Holy War against the Russians, only to turn with equal ferocity on the establishment of US bases in Saudi Arabia (seen by them as comparable to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan). In 1983, they had already attacked the Americans in Lebanon. In 1997, they murdered 60 tourists in Egypt. They are now active in North Africa, the Middle East, the Balkans, Central Asia, western China, Southeast Asia and the US. This, Chomsky points out, is *one* group. There are many others.

'It's entirely possible that bin Laden's telling the truth when he says he didn't know about the operation . . .' Chomsky suggests. 'Even if bin Laden is killed—maybe even more so if he is killed—a slaughter of innocents would only intensify the feelings of anger, desperation and frustration that are rampant in the region, and mobilise others to his horrendous cause.'

An easy 'victory' in disbanding the Taliban in Afghanistan may yet prove to be a terrible defeat for peace and security in the world.

So what would Chomsky do? Well, he asks, what was the right thing for Britain to do when IRA bombs exploded in London?

'One choice would have been to send the RAF to bomb the source of their finances, places like Boston, or to infiltrate commandos to capture those suspected of involvement in such financing and kill them or spirit them to London to face trial.'

But that, Chomsky notes, would obviously have been 'criminal idiocy'. Similarly, bombing Sicily would be an absurd way of dealing with the Mafia. Another possibility, the sane course, would be 'to consider realistically the background concerns and grievances, and try to remedy them, while at the same time following the rule of law to punish criminals.'

But different standards apply when dealing with the Third World. Chomsky identifies a hidden and deeply disturbing truth about mainstream commentators: 'It is

difficult to avoid the conclusion that at some deep level, however they may deny it to themselves, they regard our crimes against the weak to be as normal as the air we breathe.' This Chomsky sees as one of the profound effects of 'several hundred years of imperial violence on the intellectual and moral culture of the West.'

There is a high price to pay for this moral degradation. The *New York Times* locates anti-US sentiments in 'hatred for the values cherished in the West as freedom, tolerance, prosperity, religious pluralism and universal suffrage.' It matters not that bin Laden and others are clear that they are fighting a Holy War against the corrupt, repressive, 'un-Islamist' regimes of the region; that they are fighting against the devastation of Iraqi civil society by Western sanctions, and against the ruthless Israeli oppression of the Palestinians. Because we are morally blind to the horrors for which we are responsible, we cannot understand the depth of the hatred our policies have generated, and so we call inflicting yet more violence on that already suppurating wound, 'victory'.

Thus Chomsky was lambasted far and wide for comparing the atrocities of 11 September with Clinton's August 1998 cruise missile attack on the Al-Shifa pharmaceutical factory in Sudan. The attack was considered trivial in the West and has been long forgotten. And yet half the pharmaceutical production capacity of Sudan was destroyed by those missiles. 'Tens of thousands of people—many of them children—have suffered and died from malaria, tuberculosis, and other treatable diseases,' writes Jonathan Belke of the *Boston Globe*. The German Ambassador to Sudan reports: 'It is difficult to assess how many people in this poor African country died as a consequence of the destruction . . . but several tens of thousands seems a reasonable guess.' Tens of thousands of dead and next to nobody knows or cares in a society where such crimes are indeed 'as normal as the air we breathe.'

The media consensus may now be that the campaign in Afghanistan has been a resounding success. But Chomsky reminds us that in 1914 the soldiers on both sides marched off to the slaughter with enormous exuberance, encouraged by the intellectual classes and a public mobilised in support of the war: 'We should not underestimate the capacity of well-run propaganda systems to drive people to irrational, murderous, and suicidal behaviour.'

Another defeat in 'victory' could prove to be the emboldening and entrenchment of dangerous reactionary forces in society. George Bush's administration is deeply rooted in militarism and big business, particularly the oil industry. Perceived success in 'the war on terrorism' could lend even more, and perhaps terminal, strength to centres of power that are successfully opposing action on climate change.

How should social activists react to the horrific events of 11 September and thereafter? If we want to escalate the cycle of violence and increase the likelihood of worse horror to come, then we should curb our criticisms and disengage from involvement in these issues, Chomsky says. On the other hand, if we want to reverse the current, insane strategy we should intensify our efforts. As he puts it:

'It is important not to be intimidated by hysterical ranting and lies and to keep as closely as one can to the course of truth and honesty and concern for the human consequences of what one does, or fails to do. All truisms, but worth bearing in mind.'

Joe Lockard (review date spring 2002)

SOURCE: Lockard, Joe. "Chomsky on 9-11." *Judaism: A Quarterly Journal of Jewish Life and Thought* 51, no. 2 (spring 2002): 249-53.

[In the following review, Lockard discusses Noam Chomsky's 9-11, noting that the work serves more as a means for Chomsky to expostulate his long-standing political theories regarding U.S. foreign policy rather than a tribute to the tragedy of September 11, 2001.]

To give due credit, it's hard to think of another man who so robustly represents the failure of progressive thought in the United States as Noam Chomsky.

Chomsky lives in a Newtonian universe of leftism where political mass and gravitational effects are predictable, and where good and bad actors spin in a foreordained social dance. All political developments are subject to interpretation within this now-ossified model, enunciated beginning with his opposition to the Vietnam War in the 1960s. This is a peculiarly American model that, while identified within the U.S. left's core literature, resists global manifestations of class difference and capitalism-as-system as explanatory contributions towards the problems it addresses. The American-ness of this model lies in its insistence on the rule of pragmatic facts, or as William James phrased it, in a turn towards alleged "concreteness and adequacy, towards facts, towards action and towards power."

Although Chomsky has been criticized many times for this anti-theoretical blindness, most recently by Slavoj Žižek, he has not made any substantive changes in his analytic style. And it is style in which he engages, since labor, capital, and markets are notably absent from his writing. Government actions happen largely by themselves in Chomsky's model, but the social propulsion behind those actions lies beyond discussion.

In the land of uninterpreted facts, blandness rules. Style is quintessential within politics, whatever horrified and righteous protests emerge from those who believe in

substance to the exclusion of style. It is precisely the earnestness of style that appeals to sober-minded believers who seem to take up the latest Chomsky pronouncement as a substitute for a quiet evening of self-flagellation.

For all of Chomsky's insistence on logical analysis and historiographic rigor, he indulges in constant subject changes and historical ellipsis. As his new small volume—entitled simply *9-11*—of seven post-attack interviews exemplifies, Chomsky slides off the subject of September 11 as if it were a well-polished playground slide just waiting for a headdive. In Chomsky's politics such events are epiphenomena to incorporate within his decades-long lecture and established intellectual model. September 11 only provides the excuse and book title; this is an interpretive chapbook for guidance to the political faithful. The book's repetitiveness turns Chomsky, most cruelly, into the very sort of "talking head" he professes to despise.

The excursion begins with a simple postulate from which flows all manner of derivatives: the United States is the leading terrorist state. Mr. Smith isn't going to Washington; Mr. Smith is going to Terrorism Central.

Chomsky prefers to indict the history of European colonization reaching back quite literally to Columbus, as if this provided any assistance towards formulating a policy response to September 11. Rather, this retrospective invocation accepts a view of world history as simplistically bifurcated as any Samuel Huntington has produced. In this historical meta-perspective, the collapse of the WTC [World Trade Center] twin towers was no more than natives returning fire at European civilization. By locating his initial analysis of September 11 events within an overarching accusation against the U.S. as the illegitimate product of a half-millennium's worth of imperialistic sin, Chomsky only recapitulates the basic theme of his earlier *Year 501* (1993). Despite his own arguments, in the sixth of these interviews Chomsky rejects two-civilization theories. Acceptability seems to depend on just which political position employs such simplistic reductions.

No nation-state exists without an inheritance of pre-foundational violence and a history of violent self-maintenance, so adopting the pose of History's prosecutor-general provides no analytic light with which to examine the contemporary American Empire. An historical awareness of colonialism and imperialism is not synonymous with the realities of political decision-making. Foundational violence sheds little light on the current situation. Al-Qaeda operatives did not hijack and crash airliners as a belated protest over the empire-building 1846 war against Mexico. They did so for their own reasons, apparently religiocultural xenophobia, and certainly not out of compassion for the struggles of other peoples for self-determination.

Chomsky's reductionism projects a world of opposed global cultures and nation-states which is not too different from the classical political science formulations of Henry Kissinger or Raymond Aron from otherwise inimical points of view. All three built analytic philosophies within the academic trap of compassionless determinism, where model-meisters rule. Little methodological difference separates Chomsky's foreign policy thought from other political doyens whose thought he deplores.

Most seriously, the entire book does not contain more than one word of sympathy or solidarity towards September 11 victims. Chomsky's stem philosophical style does not embrace empathy, which for better or worse represents the contested heartland of American politics. This is a remarkable absence, unconscionable for its dismissal of human lives as sub-history. As a political traumatologist speaking to the international press (a majority of interviews published here are with European media), Chomsky adopts the manner of a Puritan minister on the fate of sinners in the United States. In his unrelenting moral sobriety, Chomsky remains incapable of articulating rhetoric of sympathetic and passionate identification with a U.S. voting public that can alter national policies. September 11 becomes only another excuse to exercise moral castigation.

In the one moment that Chomsky does utter sympathy for the day's victims, he manages to simultaneously mischaracterize global reaction as "virtually unanimous" in its outrage. Yet it was precisely the approval voiced over Al-Jazeera and in other regional media that worked to define the global fault lines that have developed in the attack's wake. It was not only an act that caused massive human suffering, but it is difficult to imagine another act that could work to such mutual advantage for Western racists and Islamic cultural isolationists.

The issue of Chomsky's failure to express anything beyond formal regrets is not a "loyalty test." Rather, it goes to the heart of the problem—or put alternately, it is a problem of avoiding the heart. U.S. politics have been a creature of sentimentalism from their outset. Public sentiment controlled political argument and eighteenth-century U.S. politics privileged sentimental argument as a democratic rhetoric, even as those same politics daily violated democratic equality by excluding African slaves, women, and native peoples. All of these oppressed classes fought their political counter-fights through sentimental narrative.

Chomsky is a creature of cold rationalism who neither understands this feature of U.S. culture nor apparently cares to understand that factuality does not describe the entirety of political life. September 11 created a gaping social wound in the United States, and Chomsky—together with much of the U.S. left—was capable of no

more than delivering lectures on present sins through sins of the great-great-grandfathers and well before. When people die in an atrocity of such magnitude, it is not a loyalty test to affirm heartfelt sympathy for victims, determination to punish those who committed the crime, or thoughts towards confronting proliferating and aggressive theofascist movements.

Faced with a need to find international justice and social peace between the United States, Europe, and the Middle East, where is Chomsky? Actually, still discussing Nicaragua. Lengthy and repeated passages address the Reagan administration's policies towards the Sandinista government as an example of terrorism and illegitimate state violence, once condemned by the World Court. Oliver North clones may well populate the Pentagon and need regular applications of pesticide, but this is not the topic at hand. Chomsky has mastered digression in pursuit of high ideals.

Such digressions are a means of avoiding unpalatable conclusions. Chomsky uses this same technique in the present book as much as on previous excursions into print. For example, nearly all of *The New Military Humanism's* (1999) discussion of the Racak massacre concerns events in East Timor, where he points out unassailably that many more were murdered in Dilli than in Racak. Yet what relevance does this observation bear to the question of whether NATO should act in defense of European Moslem minorities expelled from their homes and massacred? None at all, other than as an argumentative diversion.

How might recognition of horrified sentiments have altered Chomsky's rationalistic geo-political opposition to intervention? In her introduction to Saeda Vranic's heartrending account *Breaking the Wall of Silence: The Voices of Raped Bosnia* (1996), Diane Conklin writes "To read [the rape accounts] is to suffer personally." Nothing of this quality of violent suffering and social nightmare that Vranic's book exposes inhabits Chomsky's analyses, where radical empathy remains foreign. The political consequence lies in the establishment of a hierarchy of victimization, one arranged by political bloc. Neither Bosnian Moslem victims of Serb aggression nor American victims of extremist Moslem violence lie on the privileged side of this intellectual hierarchy.

Listening to Milosevic at a bar in the Hague inveigh against NATO hegemony and appropriate the language of anti-globalism, nausea rises to the gorge upon realizing that this unrepentant defense of genocide relies on the same arguments that Chomsky made and continues to deploy in 9-11. It is telling that Chomsky-style arguments gain use as a defense of violence on the grounds that it represents opposition to political hegemonism, as if this were sufficient justification of itself. Clearly,

neither Chomsky nor Harold Pinter, who has taken similar positions, can control who uses their arguments against U.S. foreign policy. Their rhetorical usefulness in the mouths of murderers, however, just as clearly derives from monodirectional ethics and attempted political sleight-of-hand to conceal violent and unjustifiable acts.

Chomsky's preoccupation with international political hegemony, which is never so hegemonic as it might seem, blinds him to anti-democratic threats from different quarters. While briefly deploring Bin Laden and al-Qaeda, Chomsky can describe them as only another noxious product of the American Empire and thus redirect attention. That is much, much too simple, for Bin Laden and al-Qaeda are violent theofascists who represent a public safety menace and need more effective address than armchair citations of international law chapter and verse. Milosevic would not now be facing an international court were it not for NATO intervention, much too late as it came. As the apparatus of international justice develops and strengthens to address cases such as Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia, there will be increased need to shape international force from out of national militaries. George Bush's increasingly single-handed war policy highlights this need for democratically-controlled international law enforcement.

The means of peaceful redress against the Bush administration and its business cronies are well-known in the relatively democratic society of the United States. Dealing with a right-wing administration is apolitical contest within a civil society; dealing with a violent religious underground is a very different species of contest. To frame the questions precisely, what are the legitimate means of social defense against an international theo-fascist movement and how can its originating causes be ameliorated? It is such questions that Chomsky entirely begs off.

Sadly, this can pass for progressive politics in the United States.

Michael Massing (essay date 4 May 2002)

SOURCE: Massing, Michael. "Surprise Best-seller Blames U.S." *New York Times* (4 May 2002): B11.

[In the following essay, Massing describes the various popular responses to Noam Chomsky's book 9-11 and the political background behind the work.]

In the weeks after the Sept. 11 attacks, Noam Chomsky, the M.I.T. linguist and political provocateur, was constantly on the telephone, giving interviews to news

organizations. In late September, he received an e-mail message from Greg Ruggiero, a senior editor of Seven Stories Press, a New York publisher. The editor of a series of political pamphlets for Seven Stories, Mr. Ruggiero had published several Chomsky pamphlets and said he wanted to publish something quickly about Sept. 11.

During the next few weeks, Mr. Ruggiero edited several of the interviews Professor Chomsky had given, and supplemented them with his own questions. On Oct. 15, just as the war in Afghanistan was beginning, the resulting 125-page pocket-size paperback went to the printer.

9-11, as the volume is titled, analyzes the attacks from the distinctive perspective that Professor Chomsky has honed in more than a dozen books. While the attacks were "horrifying atrocities," he writes, "we can think of the United States as an innocent victim only if we adopt the convenient path of ignoring the record of its actions and those of its allies."

The United States, he asserts, is "a leading terrorist state," basing his opinion on actions like its interventions in Central America, its imposition of sanctions on Iraq, its support for General Suharto in Indonesia and its backing of what he calls "Israeli atrocities" in the occupied territories.

As for Afghanistan, Professor Chomsky argued against military action, maintaining that an attack by the United States would probably kill "enormous numbers" of "innocent civilians." At a time when American flags were popping up on T-shirts and car antennas, publishing such an analysis hardly seemed propitious. "People said it would have no success whatsoever," said Daniel Simon, the publisher of Seven Stories, "because most Americans were lock-step behind the war."

As soon as the volume hit bookstores, however, it began selling briskly, and it hasn't stopped. More than 115,000 copies have been shipped to stores, said Kim Wylie, senior vice president of Publishers Group West, which distributes the book and has had a hard time keeping up with the demand. The paperback has also been published in 22 countries and has been a best-seller in 5 of them. In the United States, it has made the best-seller lists of *The Washington Post*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *The Boston Globe*, *The Village Voice* and Amazon.com.

The book is a swift seller at independent bookstores. Labyrinth Books, near Columbia University, has sold more than 380 copies of *9-11*, making it the best-selling nonfiction book (aside from those required for courses) in the store's five-year history. The St. Mark's Bookshop in the East Village has sold 870 copies. At Kramerbooks in Washington, *9-11* has far outsold all other books about Sept. 11.

"It just sits there on the register and sells," said Mitch Brown, the store's general manager. And at Prairie Lights in Iowa City, the book is "going like gangbusters," said Terry Cain, a store manager. "It's doing really well for a book that's not hot fiction or endorsed by Oprah."

Bookstore chains have also reported strong sales. Barnes & Noble has sold about 14,000 copies. And though New York, Los Angeles and other large cities account for the bulk of those sales, *9-11* is also doing well at Barnes & Noble in cities like Minneapolis-St. Paul (250 copies), Houston (200) and Columbus, Ohio (130). Such a performance—considered extraordinary in the publishing world for a quick political book—has come despite limited promotion and few reviews. Aside from a plaudit in *The San Francisco Chronicle* and a pan in *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, *9-11* has received little attention in the mainstream press. (This is true of most of Professor Chomsky's books, which editors commonly regard as too extreme to merit comment.)

Many who have bought the book are probably longtime Chomsky fans. Professor Chomsky has long had a loyal following on campuses, and his latest book has done especially well in college bookstores. But the sales volume suggests that his book is appealing to "a much broader audience," Ms. Wylie said.

Seeking to explain the book's success, booksellers cite its succinct title, striking cover (a stark black-and-white picture of the twin towers before the attacks), low price (\$8.95) and accessible question-and-answer format. "People are coming in every day, asking, 'What can I read that can give me some understanding of what's happening?'" said Virginia Harabin, the floor manager at the Politics and Prose Bookstore in Washington. "This is the one I recommend."

Mr. Chomsky sees the success of *9-11* as part of a more general phenomenon. "Sept. 11 was a wake-up call," he said. "It raised questions in people's minds they had never really thought about before. They're concerned, confused and angry."

These sentiments come from far beyond the usual core of Chomsky readers. "I've gotten hundreds, maybe thousands, of letters from people saying they had never before heard anything like what I'm saying," Professor Chomsky said.

Many, though, find his analysis off the wall. "*9-11* is not a normal book," said Susie Linfield, who teaches cultural reporting and criticism in the New York University department of journalism. "It's a series of questions and answers. It reminds me of the old Kim Il Sung tracts—sayings of the great man," she added, referring to the founding leader of North Korea. What's

more, she said, "Chomsky's view of the world is that all evil emanates from one source: U.S. power. So in the case of Sept. 11, Osama bin Laden is entirely a creature of the United States."

"It's a compelling world view," Professor Linfield noted, "but a wrong one."

A survey of more than 80 reader comments posted on Amazon's Web site showed sharply divided views. "Chomsky's a truth-seeker in a world full of lies," one reader stated. "His arguments cut through all the rubbish and nonsense we're all exposed to here in the United States every day and present an alternative, informed perspective."

Nearly as many reviews were dismissive. "I imagine that he would blame a woman for getting raped, too," wrote a reader from Boston. "Can't he find the dustbin of history and take up residence there?" Others accused Mr. Chomsky of trying to cash in on the attack.

Hate the book or love it, readers keep buying it. As Mr. Ruggiero of Seven Stories observed: "People want alternatives. In times of war, that's when people trust the media the least."

Derek Hook (review date June 2002)

SOURCE: Hook, Derek. Review of *9-11*, by Noam Chomsky. *Theoria* (June 2002): 128-30.

[In the following review, Hook stresses that, despite his extreme stance on U.S. foreign policy, Noam Chomsky's arguments in *9-11* provide some useful correctives about recent political history.]

Foremost amongst Chomsky's gifts as a critical political analyst is an eye for the counter-intuitive. *9-11*, a collection of interviews conducted in the immediate aftermath of September 11th, is a case in point. Chomsky's flair for political arguments that run against the grain of commonsense manifests in two particular ways here: a refutation of overly conventionalized modes of response to these events, and the astute use of historical counter-examples with which to challenge such formulaic responses.

Although condemning the attacks, Chomsky focuses on the particular rhetoric of propaganda characteristic of the U.S. media's treatment of these events. The notion of "terrorism", argues Chomsky, applies as pertinently to the U.S. as to those considered responsible for the Manhattan and Washington attacks. Turning political stereotypes on their head, Chomsky convincingly argues—with reference to the definitions of U.S. military protocols—that the U.S. is itself a leading ter-