How can we make sense of the innovative structure of Euripidean drama? And what political role did tragedy play in the democracy of classical Athens? These questions are usually considered to be mutually exclusive, but this book shows that they can only be properly answered together. Providing a new approach to the aesthetics and politics of Greek tragedy, this book argues that the poetic form of Euripides' drama constitutes a mode of political thought. Through readings of select plays, the book explores the politics of Euripides' radical aesthetics, showing how formal innovation generates political passions with real-world consequences. Euripides' plays have long perplexed readers. With their disjointed plots, comic touches, and frequent happy endings, they seem to stretch the boundaries of tragedy. But the plays' formal traits—from their exorbitantly beautiful lyrics to their arousal and resolution of suspense—shape the audience's political sensibilities and ideological attachments. Engendering civic passions, the plays enact as well as express political ideas. The book draws out the political implications of Euripidean aesthetics by exploring such topics as narrative and ideological desire, the politics of pathos, realism and its utopian possibilities, the logic of political allegory, and tragedy's relation to its historical moment. Breaking through the impasse between formalist and historicist interpretations of Greek tragedy, the book demonstrates that aesthetic structure and political meaning are mutually implicated—and that to read the plays poetically is necessarily to read them politically.
La clemenza di Tito, a political allegory, dramatizes clemency as a central tenet of enlightened governance. The events of the plot allow dark tendencies in human nature to threaten enlightenment values (and Rome itself), but ultimately suggest the futility of rebellion against a virtuous and benevolent ruler. The restoration of these values depends on recognition scenes in which the three central protagonists overcome their baser instincts: Vitellia her jealousy and ambition, Sesto his abandonment of reason for passion, and Tito his angry renunciation of his merciful policies. These recognition scenes are shown to be central to the opera's dramatization of enlightenment themes. At the dénouement, Tito pardons the conspirators, reaffirms his policy of clemency, and exclaims, “Let it be known in Rome that I am myself” — a moment of self-recognition vital to the sense of the ending.

Paradise Lost, from the Sublime to the Ridiculous

David Francis Taylor

in The Politics of Parody: A Literary History of Caricature, 1760-1830

This chapter assesses John Milton's Paradise Lost as a source for graphic satire. The many graphic satirical parodies of Paradise Lost disclose the workings of two different political readings of the poem, readings that respectively function to attenuate and foster rather different conceptions of the Miltonic sublime. The first, and more familiar, regards Milton's epic as an anti-Whig allegory that warns readers of the dangers of opposing the constitutional authority of the sovereign. In contrast to this reading of Paradise Lost, one that looks to it as a political allegory of and for the present, a different and still more complex approach to the poem emerges in a number of James Gillray's mature caricatures. In a manner that is highly idiosyncratic, Gillray seems less interested in conscripting Milton's text as a cautionary tale of rebellion and more concerned with exploiting the generic peculiarities of Paradise Lost for satirical and political effect.

Late Shakespeare

Simon Palfrey
Shakespeare's late plays are usually seen in terms of courtliness and escapism. But the critical tradition has been too decorous. Neither neo-Christian pieties nor high-political allegory can account for the works' audacity and surprise, or the popular investment in both their form and meaning. Post-structuralist and historicist approaches show the indeterminacy and materiality of language, but rarely identify how particular figures (words and characters) capture and energize contested history. Recent criticism tends to put a pre-emptive 'master-paradigm' above all else; a more sinuous, minutely attentive critical vocabulary is needed to apprehend Shakespeare's turbulent, precise, teeming metaphorical discourse.

Allegories of Hell: Moral Tales and National Shadows
Gina Marchetti

in Andrew Lau and Alan Mak's Infernal Affairs - The Trilogy

Infernal Affairs presents a story that includes layers attached to traditional preoccupations with Buddhism, Confucianism, clan loyalties, and patriarchal prerogatives, to questions of colonialism/post-colonialism and the issue of "national" identity, and to postmodern preoccupations with the transnational, post-industrial economy, consumerism, and the information society. The trilogy opens up to multiple allegorical readings that co-exist within the narrative — occasionally contradicting one another, supporting one another, or canceling each other out. The moral allegory exhausts itself, and the possibility of looking at Infernal Affairs as a political allegory about the Chinese nation and the transformation of the colonial state emerges. The policing in Hong Kong are described. Looking at Infernal Affairs as an allegory about the legitimate right of the People's Republic of China (PRC) to step out of the "shadows" to participate more fully in Hong Kong affairs for the greater good of the citizenry on both sides of the border may really miss the point.

Poetry of Opposition and Revolution
Howard Erskine-Hill
This book studies the relation between poetry and politics in English literature from Dryden to Wordsworth. It reveals that the major tradition of political allusion is not, as has often been argued, that of the political allegory and overtly political poems, but rather it reflects a more shifting and less systematic practice, often involving equivocal or multiple reference. Drawing on the revisionist trend in recent historiography, the book offers readings of familiar texts. Dryden's Aeneid version and Pope's Rape of The Lock are shown to belong not just to contemporary convention, but to a more widespread and older style of envisioning high politics and the crises of government. The early books of The Prelude can be seen to show marked political features; reflections of the 1688 Revolution are traced in The Rape of the Lock; and a Jacobite emotion is identified in The Vanity of Human Wishes. Taking issue with recent New Historicist Romantic criticism, the concluding chapters argue that what have seemed to many to be traces of covert political displacement or erasure in Wordsworth are in fact marks of a continuing political preoccupation, which found new forms after the collapse of the Enlightenment programme into the Jacobin terror.

The Literary Cold War, 1945 to Vietnam

Adam Piette

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This book is a study of the psychological and cultural impact of the Cold War on the imaginations of citizens in the UK and US. It examines writers working at the hazy borders between aesthetic project and political allegory, with specific attention being paid to Vladimir Nabokov and Graham Greene as Cold War writers. The book looks at the special relationship as a form of paranoid plotline governing key Anglo-American texts from Storm Jameson to Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes, as well as examining the figure of the non-aligned neutral observer caught up in the sacrificial triangles structuring Cold War fantasy. The book aims to consolidate and define a new emergent field in literary studies, the literary Cold War, following the lead of prominent historians of the period. It looks at leading Anglo-American writers in terms of the Cold War as a psychological and fantasy phenomenon. It provides significant readings of key post-war writers.
In this introduction to his volume The Portable Rousseau (1973), Paul de Man focuses on Jean-Jacques Rousseau's Social Contract. He begins by discussing the notion of textual allegory, as it derives from the Social Contract, and how it provides the generalising principle which makes it possible to consider theotropical or ethical allegories as particularised versions of this generative model and thus to break down the significance of such thematic distinctions. He then suggests that the ‘inclusion’ of a deconstructed version of the Profession de foi within the context of the Social Contract is predictable, since both works can be considered as the same political allegory, the first on a figural, the second on a textual level. He also cites Rousseau's novel La nouvelle Héloïse as a textural allegory like the Social Contract and not like the Profession de foi.

Incarcerated in Amerika: Literature Addresses the Political, with the Help of Ernesto Laclau

Henry Sussman

This chapter examines the presentation of political themes in Franz Kafka's novel Amerika. It suggests that Argentine political theorist Ernesto Laclau played a role in addressing political issues in literature. It analyzes the parallelism between a specific set of affairs prevailing in Kafka's day and the work that embodied his response to multiple and multifaceted factors. It suggests that the political thematics and allegory of the novel are endowed with a full range of psychoanalytical parameters.
Roger Boyle's Parthenissa, published serially throughout the 1650s, is one of a group of mid-seventeenth-century British prose romances that share a penchant for political allegory. Most mid-century romance became obscure within a few years of the Restoration, but Parthenissa was read well into the eighteenth century, when by conventional literary history its outmoded genre would seem to have been replaced by the more sophisticated and entertaining form of the novel. Doubtless part of the attraction of Parthenissa's generically typical roman à clef form was the access it seemed to promise to the inside story of Boyle's political career. But Parthenissa is also intensely self-conscious about literary form and interpretation, and at several moments it begins to construct a model for prose narrative structure that in retrospect turns out to have been oddly modern.

**Fantasies of flight and flights of fancy: rewriting history and retreating from trauma in The Plot Against America**

David Brauner

The publication of The Plot Against America (2004) was attended with more fanfare and controversy than any of Philip Roth's books since Portnoy's Complaint (1969). Just as Portnoy had been heralded as the publishing event of 1969 long before its actual appearance, so The Plot Against America was trailed by a carefully orchestrated marketing campaign which exploited rumours that the novel's title alluded to the events of 9/11 and which included the dissemination of extracts from the book prior to its publication. In spite of Roth's own repeated denials that the book was intended as an oblique or symbolic commentary on George W. Bush's 'war against terror', many early reviewers read the novel as, and many readers bought the book anticipating, a political allegory. This chapter looks at The Plot Against America alongside Jonathan Safran...
Foer's novel Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close (2005) as studies of the relationship between history and fiction, trauma and imagination. So many reviewers couched their critiques in terms of the realism, or otherwise, of Roth's and Foer's novels.

. Actors Transcending the Darkness
Matthew Carter

in Myth of the Western: New Perspectives on Hollywood's Frontier Narrative
Published in print: 2014 Published Online: January 2015
Item type: chapter

This chapter develops the previous chapter's concerns, describing the borderlands setting of Joel Coen's No Country for Old Men as a term of both geographical and ideological reference. It also develops the theme of America's national identity in relation to the Western. It does this through recourse to The Searchers, as well as to more recent films with a contemporary setting. Like Three Burials, No Country has been regarded as a post-Western. This chapter scrutinises this appellation, providing a short account of the supposed historical development of the genre in this direction. It then discusses the allegorical significance of No Country in (de)constructing the cultural rhetoric behind early twenty-first-century US foreign policies. While certainly not comprising the whole of No Country's significance, a discussion of these issues does provide a critical inroad into the figure of the Western hero. The hero provides the lens by which the chapter observes how No Country utilises the Western's generic conventions in order to affect a critique of the cultural-ideological influence that the myth of the West still holds over the political trajectory of the United States in its self-assumed role as the world's figurative lawman.

Before Daybreak
Coilin Owens

Published in print: 2013 Published Online: May 2013
Item type: book

“After the Race” registers James Joyce's personal anxieties and rivalries on the verge of his emigration from Dublin. In the figure of Villona, the detached and gifted musician, Joyce sketches his first self-portrait, heralding the dawn of his own literary career as “the poet of my nation.” The story reflects the radical nationalist perception articulated by
Arthur Griffith that the staging the Gordon Bennett Cup Race and King Edward VII's visit in July 1903 were both designed to upstage the centennial celebration of Robert Emmet's rebellion. The story allegorizes these Anglo-Irish tensions within the Great Game of global politics. The technique of the story—its design, use of free indirect discourse, multivalent language, significant silences, and cunning allusions—assimilates elements from its author's rhetorical education and invokes precedents from Ovid, Villon, Dumas, Dolmetsch, and the Irish oral tradition. The story therefore documents Joyce's multiple affinities with the mainstream of European literature and with the popular movement to revive native cultural practices. On the moral and philosophical planes, the story invokes the Pauline criticism of pagan materialism while brilliantly parodying the vacuous calculations of Theosophy. This apprentice exercise exhibits many of Joyce's permanent themes and is demonstrably a sophisticated political and philosophic work written in the shadow of Dante's Divine Comedy.

Hou Xiaoxian and Zhu Tianwen

Hsiu-Chuang Deppman

in Adapted for the Screen: The Cultural Politics of Modern Chinese Fiction and Film

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Item type: chapter

This chapter is about Zhu Tianwen’s 1986 adaptation into literature of A Time to Live, A Time to Die, a 1985 film by Hou Xiaoxian. Notably, Zhu herself had served as a screenwriter for the film. A political allegory about Taiwan’s coming of age in the 1950s and 1960s, Hou uses the perspective of a teenage boy whose family emigrates from the mainland to Taiwan in 1948, right before the Communist Revolution in 1949. The comparison between Hou, one of the most influential Taiwanese/Chinese directors today, and Zhu, a preeminent Chinese/Taiwanese woman writer, highlights the “literary cinematics” of both artists and reveals competing gender and nationalist politics in Taiwan’s multicultural society.