Political Literature: A Pistol Shot in the Dark

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“Politics in a work of literature is like a pistol-shot in the middle of a concert, something loud and vulgar, and yet a thing to which it is not possible to refuse one’s attention” (Howe, 1957, p. 15). This remark by Stendhal, found in a series of essays compiled by political scientist Irving Howe, alludes to the significance of the novel in politics. This description, however, does not provide a clear definition of what constitutes political fiction. To clarify the significance of political fiction, Stendhal suggests that political literature is a story portrayed against a political background or setting and is one in which political ideology carries the story line. He further enriches his definition by adding that the political novel is “the kind in which the idea of society, as distinct from the mere unquestioned workings of society, has penetrated the consciousness of the characters in all of its profoundly problematic aspects, so that there is to be observed in their behavior, and that they are themselves often aware of, some coherent political loyalty or ideological identification” (Howe, 1957, p. 19). A political novel must evoke in the reader an emotional instinct for striving for the betterment of society and may offer the groundwork for the achievement of the proposed ideal. Furthermore, political fiction attempts to educate and inform its audiences of political theories, ideologies and systems presenting this information in an entertaining and enjoyable genre.

Taken as a whole, these definitions appear to be a fair representation of the character of political fiction; however, can the political novel be assessed as an important aspect of a political society or simply be classified as pleasurable literature? Many political theorists believe that there is an “intrinsically artistic aspect to politics” and that in a political society it is impossible to completely separate the two. Political theorist Benjamin Barber suggests in his edited work, The Artist and the Vision, that it would “seem apparent that the artist and the statesman, the poet and the legislator, occupy some of the same ground and pursue many of the same objectives: a
clear view of human reality in its private and public dimensions; a vision of alternate human features; and a full picture of complex human reality, particularly as it impinges on how women and men choose to live their lives" (Barber and McGrath, 1982, p. ix).

As early as the fifteenth century, this view of the political system as a “work of art” is apparent in the works of such highly esteemed political thinkers as Rousseau, Hobbes, and Machiavelli (Barber and McGrath, 1982, p. 3). More recently, the 1930's saw a heightened emergence of political literature because, as essayist William Phillips points out, “it was a time when responsibility meant responsibility to ideas and convictions, justice seemed more important than expediency, the greater good meant more than the lesser evil, and dreams seemed more cogent than reality” (Panichas, 1971, p. 7). Regardless of the view that politics and literature are closely linked due to the political society in which we exist, can political literature really be termed an important aspect of society? Furthermore, is political fiction an effective means of portraying ideals and educating audiences? This essay attempts to answer these questions through exploration of the advantages and disadvantages of political literature.

According to Maureen Whitebrook’s essay in Literature and the Political Imagination, which addresses the novel and its relationship to political theory, there are two main categories of advantages to the presence of political fiction in a society. Political literature encourages reflection and speculation about ideals, allowing readers to assess the political system in which they live and promotes consideration for courses of action. Political fiction also assists in the process of thought and the accumulation of knowledge, by educating and enlightening audiences. These two characteristics contribute to the third advantage Whitebrook presents, which is the political novel’s contribution to prudent and responsible behavior (Horton and Baumeister, 1996, p. 45).
The first proposed advantage states that the presence and use of political fiction increases an individual's capacity for enabling reflection and speculation before engaging in action. This argument can be supported in a number of ways. The characteristic of political novels that encourages assessment not merely on an individual level but on the socio-political level of groups and societies at large, allows for questions of basic human existence, characteristics and life to be explored and considered. In the introduction to his edited collection of essays, political theorist John Horton suggests that "certain truths about human life can only be fittingly and accurately stated in the language and forms characteristic of the narrative artist...the telling itself...expresses a sense of life and of value, a sense of what matters and what does not, of what learning and communication are, (and) of life's relations and connections" (Horton and Baumeister, 1996, p. 38). Another important aspect revolves around the novel itself. Since the beginning of mankind, humans have perceived and understood their lives, identities, and histories in story format. As a result, much of our political identity already exists entrenched in stories, myths and fables (Horton and Baumeister, 1996, p. 15). The political novel simply acts as an extension of what is already intrinsically embedded in one's genetic makeup and offers a format that is easily understood and accepted. For centuries, the only information known concerning past societies, histories and governments existed through story telling passed down from one generation to the next. Consequentially, this natural inclination toward stories allows an individual to explore and if necessary rediscover "a sense of density in our lives" through the format of the political novel (Horton and Baumeister, 1996, p. 30). Political fiction in this philosophical sense makes "the claim that literary form and human life are inseparable ... that literary forms call forth certain specific sorts of practical activity in the reader that can be evoked in no other way... (and) that we need a story of a certain kind, with characters of a certain type in
it, if our own sense of life and of value is to be called forth in the way most appropriate for practical reflection” (Horton and Baumeister, 1996, p. 37). This story-telling style of political literature draws on an individual’s deepest roots and un-consciously educates and informs the reader.

The ability of political fiction to assist in the thought process and in the formation and accumulation of knowledge, therefore assisting judgment, is probably its most important advantage. It does this in a variety of ways. John Horton quotes two characteristics of the political novel identified by George Orwell as reasoning for his use of the format. First, “the novel is a much more appropriate vehicle than the political pamphlet or theoretical treatise for communicating and sharing lived experience” (Horton and Baumeister, 1996, p. 24). This expression of personal ideals and theories through story format allows the author to educate his audiences in a natural and almost subtle fashion. The novel is also much more likely to reach various different segments of society due to its format and its appeal as entertainment. Many individuals of various class levels and income have access to literature through public and school libraries, whereas numerous other formats are less attainable. Varied levels of education can be reached through a literary format and individuals can progress at their own speed. Secondly, “the novel implies a relationship between the author and the reader of a more egalitarian and less authoritarian cast than most orthodox philosophical or political modes of writing” (Horton and Baumeister, 1996, p. 24). Political information in a literary format allows the reader to take the author’s information and use it to construct his or her own personal theories and views. The author’s information is presented through style, theme, and character devices rather than through straightforward instruction. This characteristic was especially important to Orwell for it undermined any imperialist characteristics that could arise from a relationship where “the wise
man" attempts to pass knowledge on to the ignorant masses (Horton and Baumeister, 1996 p. 24).

The existence and acknowledgement of choices and alternatives is an imperative characteristic of the political novel, which assists in the accumulation of knowledge. The depiction of various characters and the outline of their choices and eventual outcomes is a crucial aspect of any novel. However, in a political novel these depictions lay the groundwork for audiences to evaluate and make their own personal choices and decisions. In addition, the presentation of hypothetical dilemmas, situations, and outcomes further informs and educates the reader, thus assisting the decision-making process. Whitebrook contends that "novels assist those processes of thought which are necessary to any but the most instinctive or impulsive decisions to act: they allow understanding which then makes possible the decision to act or not to act" (Horton and Baumeister, 1996, p. 45). Furthermore, political novels allow their audiences to see the "necessity of making choices, the psychological pressures on the individuals who face them, the moral dilemmas involved... the consequences of choice, and the political effects of reactions to those problems" (Horton and Baumeister, 1996, p. 47). This characteristic is of the utmost importance to the political novel for it allows for the exploration of motives, choices, and outcomes and is able to present the "behind the scenes" steps that lead to the decisions made, as well as their effect on the individual and community as a whole. Moral dilemmas can be addressed and the conflict between political responsibilities and orders in relation to an individual's morality explored in a hypothetical context. Political literature holds the power to force "the reader to confront the possibility and even the necessity of having to choose between ethical guidelines appropriate to private relationships and those entailed by responsibility to larger, more public constituencies" (Horton and Baumeister, 1996, p. 47). Infinite possibilities
and hypothetical circumstances can be explored, debated, and assessed in order to determine the best courses of action without causing problems or harm to society.

The combination of the political novel’s ability to encourage reflection and speculation as well as to assist in the process of thought and the accumulation of knowledge combines to contribute and encourage prudent and responsible behavior of its audiences. This combination engages the reader and provides the capacity for responsible behavior in the political arena. This aspect of political literature’s “ethical utilities” is nicely summarized in Geoffrey Harpham’s essay in Literature and the Political Imagination:

“Literature, it is said, articulates goals, instructs people on how to picture and understand human situations, moralizes action by showing its ends, provides models of motivations and a set of character types and decisional models, structures an opportunity for the reader to test his or her capacity for discovering and acknowledging the moral law, holds the mirror up to the community so that it can identify and judge itself, represents negotiations between the community and the individual, engenders a relation between author and reader, promotes explanatory models that help make sense of different situations and that shelter the subject from the threat of inchoate, fixes the past and so makes possible free action in the future, and models the “unity” that might be desirable in a human life” (Horton and Baumeister, 1996, p. 39).

Once a reader has seen the consequences and outcomes of political action in a novel, the desire to engage in action is evoked. A major dilemma in today’s political society is the belief by many individuals that their parts are small and insignificant. Through political fiction, education and emphasis on the individual’s role in the political arena are achieved and encourages the readers to pursue their political duty to society.

Despite the many benefits that exist in the use of political fiction, disadvantages also subsist and counter some of the advantages. In political fiction, the author holds a power over its audience that can be manipulated, misconstrued, and misused. George Panichas, in his assessment of twentieth century novelists, uses an example straight from the mouth of a famous
political novelist to support the inevitability of an author's misuse of power over his audience. He cites George Orwell who himself admits "that every artist is a propagandist...in the sense that he is trying, directly or indirectly, to impose a vision of life that seems to him desirable" (Panichas, 1971, p. xxxiii). This aspect of political fiction is ungoverned as literary work is not hindered or regulated by rules and guidelines. The existence of ideology in literature, particularly political literature, allows for an "extreme individualization of views." According to Panichas, "ideology personalizes art and the artist becomes a propagandist, a promoter of personality, (and) a seeker of myths" (Panichas, 1971, p. 5). Alongside this view is the fear that authors of political literature will be viewed as theorists when expressing their ideologies through their art. While this may not seem to be of much importance, many political scientists believe that authors of political literature, in their ardent desire to express their views, may unobjectively portray their theories. As a result, the theorist label may be misleading to their audiences. Julien Benda's essay describing his views in The Betrayal of the Intellectuals supports this argument by expressing that "writers of political literature present their political passions with all the characteristics of passion-tendency to action, thirst for immediate results, exclusive preoccupation with the desired end, the scorn for augment, the excess, and the hatred of fixed ideas" (Panichas, 1971, p. 4).

Moving away from the authors themselves, critics argue that a major disadvantage of political literature is that, though informative, it does not require action to be taken. Ideas are expressed and presented; however, the "story" ends there, and action, which is at the forefront of politics, remains static. Reading a political novel does not necessarily imply or advocate responsive participation in the political arena. "Being richly responsive to a situation in a novel does not require us to do anything" (Horton and Baumeister, 1996, p. 44). Though perhaps
better informed or more educated, an individual is not given "adequate information for action" through the political novel alone. An individual may not finish a political novel and feel motivated to become involved; many novels simply increase and support the belief that all is hopeless and that individual action does not carry enough weight to solicit change.

Interpretation is another disadvantage of the political novel. Fiction is often much less straightforward than other outlets for political information. In many cases this aspect is a large part of political fiction's appeal; however, its ambiguity can lead to misinterpretations and misunderstandings by the reader. As George Orwell expressed it, he was "committed not so much to giving anyone who wanted a duplicate key as to leaving the door wide open" (Horton and Baumeister, 1996, p. 235). This idea of an "open door" though intriguing, can result in a reader missing the point entirely, thus decreasing the political novel's effectiveness and agenda. Critics of Orwell suggest that he left the "door too open," often not giving the audience enough guidelines to effectively follow his beliefs. Regarding Orwell's novel, 1984, political theorist Michael Wilding quotes critic Richard Gerber in his novel Political Fictions, stating that Orwell leaves the audience with "the impression that there is still a good deal of undigested material, that there is too much political and social theory" (Wilding, 1980, p. 10). A more concrete example of the dangers of misinterpretation is Mark Twain's spelling of "sivilization" as spoken by his character Huck in Huckleberry Finn. Numerous explanations exist: pronunciation, dialect, or Huck's ignorance are just a few of the suggestions. Each of the different interpretations surrounding the spelling of "sivilization" can give the audience a misconception of what the author was really trying to convey (Wilding, 1980, p. 15).

Political literature has its share of advantages and disadvantages; however, taken as a whole its benefits greatly outweigh a few minor costs. Political propaganda in a novel can be
used by an author to manipulate or mislead audiences; yet, most readers can reject or interpret propaganda to their own benefit. Rather than regarding this aspect of political fiction as a disadvantage it should be viewed as an educational opportunity for the audience. A political novel may not force the reader into immediate action, but it plants the seeds needed to begin the process. Additionally, interpretation of a political message allows the reader to be further educated and enlightened, regardless of whether or not the interpretation is the one intended by the author. The political novel brings politics to the masses and attempts to educate and inform audiences that might otherwise remain ignorant. As a result, it encourages individuals to become more involved in their political system in an effort to make their community and eventually the world, a better place.

Political fiction exists in many differing forms and genres. A political novel can be categorized as romance, science fiction, history, or mystery and can be organized in various formats and styles. Wilding addresses this fact through Morris Edmond Speare’s study, *The Political Novel* (1924), where the political novel is defined as “a work of prose fiction which leans rather to ‘ideas’ than to ‘emotions;’ which deals rather with the machinery of law-making or with a theory about public conduct than with the merits of any given piece of legislation; and where the main purpose of the writer is party propaganda, public reform, or exposition of the lives of the personages who maintain government, or of the forces which constitute government” (Wilding, 1980, p. 1). The implementation of these characteristics in the novel format can be done in a variety of ways. Varying stylistic devices, story themes and character development techniques can effectively turn a piece of literature into a political novel. Further and more detailed exploration of the advantages and disadvantages of political literature is discussed in the
following case studies emphasizing the importance and significance of style, theme, and character development in relevance to creating an effective and influential political novel.

Case Study 1: Stylistic Devices

The wide variety of stylistic devices used in literature allows similar topics to be explored in numerous ways, satisfying an extensive diversity of personal tastes and preferences. Two especially constructive devices used to create an effective political novel are preaching and satire. Exploration of the effectiveness of these stylistic devices will focus on two particular political works: Uncle Tom's Cabin by Harriet Beecher Stowe and Animal Farm by George Orwell.

Written in 1852, Uncle Tom's Cabin was a political novel written by Stowe in an attempt to raise awareness of the abolitionist movement. The novel follows the life of various members of the slave community, but specifically focuses on the life of Uncle Tom, a middle aged African-American slave, who is uprooted from a comfortable and loving lifestyle (though still in slavery) to a heartless and cruel master who eventually murders him. Stowe depicts the slaves as pious individuals who are continuously wronged and dehumanized by the actions of the southern white communities (Stowe, 1996). Throughout the novel, the author blatantly suggests ideas and proposals for political reform. The audience is informed of the horrors of the current political situation and is given the information necessary to take action and remedy the situation. Stowe addresses her audience in much the same way as a preacher would address a congregation and the entire novel follows this preaching style.
Stowe’s use of a preaching style was an effective choice for her time period and audience. Three characteristics of Stowe’s writing defined the preaching style: use of sentimentality, altruism, and Biblical typology. Her employment of this stylistic device was intended to facilitate the spread of the message that she felt so passionately about. She was very successful in her endeavor: Uncle Tom’s Cabin was an instant best seller and gained her the notoriety of being the “little lady who started the big war” (Lowance Jr., et al., p. 3).

Similar to the way a preacher evokes the sentiments of a congregation in order to reinforce statements and views Stowe relied on sentiment to further her own political agenda. Uncle Tom’s Cabin found its success through its ability to “invoke the rhetoric of sentimentality, to appeal to the authority of emotional experience” (Lowance Jr., et al., 1994, p. 13). Stowe used sentimentality as her focal characteristic throughout the novel because it encouraged her audience to empathy without the confusion and chance of misinterpretation that overtly religious or Republican ideals could bring. Stowe begins the novel by creating a sense of equality of emotion between slaves and whites. She encourages the reader to sentimentality by creating slave characters that the audience can relate to and empathize with. As the novel progresses, Stowe capitalizes on this sense of emotional equality by choosing a child’s death as her chosen sentimental metaphor (Lowance Jr., et al., 1994, p. 29). Midway through the novel, the death of Eva becomes the “sentimental linchpin; she can induce feelings in readers that can then be transferred onto Tom” thus solidifying the sense of equality of emotion and sentimentality between the white community and the black slaves (Lowance Jr., et al., 1994, p. 29).

Following along with the emphasis on sentimentality, Stowe uses altruism to further define her preaching style. The use of altruism “as an imaginative/psychological process in which a person intensely and sympathetically identifies himself or herself with an ‘other,’
another person or another group, is located in the reader” (Eiselein, 1996, p. 56). Stowe continuously employs this technique in order to encourage the reader to identify with the characters. An example of this is seen during the beginning of the novel, when Eliza is forced to flee with her son. Gregory Eiselein’s study, Literature and Humanitarian Reform in the Civil War Era, emphasizes the importance of this stylistic device in Stowe’s writing specifically through the repetition of “you” and “your” during Eliza’s speech to the audience:

“If it were your Harry, Mother, or your Willie, that were going to be torn from you by a brutal trader, to-morrow morning—if you had seen the man, and heard that the papers were signed and delivered, and you had only from 12:00 till morning to make good your escape,---how fast could you walk? How many miles could you make in those few brief hours, with the darling at your bosom—the little sleepy head on your shoulder,---the small, soft arms trustingly holding on to your neck?” (Eiselein, 1996, p. 56).

The prominence Stowe places on the similarities between the audience and the characters places the reader in the same emotional plight as the character and evokes a sympathetic response to their position. Explicitly stated, Stowe uses altruism as “a feature of a coercive humanitarianism when the pain of the patient (the hounded slave) became merely a site for the agent of humanitarianism to experience the vicarious pleasure of suffering unjustly inflicted pain” (Eiselein, 1996, p. 56).

A third aspect of Stowe’s preaching style is her use of Biblical typology. Stowe argues the evils of slavery by establishing a moral authority based on the Bible’s teachings, thus validating her beliefs and depictions. She uses biblical narratives throughout her writings and quotes scriptures through the mouths of her characters. The most emphatic aspect of the Biblical typology is seen through the personalities and actions of the characters themselves. Uncle Tom is depicted as a “suffering servant or Messiah figure,” full of forgiveness and love, Eva is an angel on earth intent on bringing others to Christianity and Legree is the perfect anti-christ—self-serving, greedy and malicious (Lowance Jr., et al., 1994, p. 160). This facet of Stowe’s
preaching style is one of the most influential and effective devices she employs. “It was the use of the Bible that provided the moral authority for such outrage, and the saturation of the population with the language and rhetoric of the Bible that gave her book even more force than its narrative line produces through sentimental and antislavery rhetoric” (Lowance Jr., et al., 1994, p. 184).

Stowe’s stylistic device of preaching is one of the main aspects that made Uncle Tom’s Cabin a success. She forced others to recognize and assess her political agenda while invoking their sympathies and winning them over to her ideologies. Her use of sentimentality, altruism and Biblical typology solidified her style and contributed to the emotional outcry that her novel aroused. Without these characteristics, her message could easily have been lost to her audience; the atrocities dismissed as fiction and the political implications foregone.

Another example of the impact that literary style can have on a political novel and its effectiveness is Animal Farm. Written by George Orwell in 1944, Animal Farm tells the story of a group of barnyard animals that revolt against the oppression of their farmer master and take over the farm. The animals form ranks, with the smartest (the pigs) acting at the forefront. Equality is the supposed goal; however, the pigs soon establish themselves as the superior leaders. Eventually the other animals realize that instead of achieving true freedom, they have simply traded one dictatorship for another (Orwell, 1946).

Orwell wrote Animal Farm in order to criticize certain governments while offering suggestions and reasoning for their successes and failures. His chosen satirical style is defined by the novel’s sense of inevitability, the description of an insoluble problem, and the negative and cynical ending (Holderness, Loughrey, and Yousaff, 1998, p. 31). These aspects of the novel are implemented through Orwell’s choice for characters and his negative tone.
Orwell chose to depict his satire in the form of a fairy tale/fable. His choice of the fairy tale genre is enhanced and enlightened by the use of animals as the main characters; however, they are depicted and described as having human characteristics and personalities. “The mare Clover ‘had never quite got her figure back after her fourth foal’ and Benjamin’s cynicism is undercut by her devotion to Boxer” (Holderness, Loughrey, and Yousaff, 1998, p. 33). The human descriptions allow the audience to identify with the characters and yet remain passively detached because of their animal characteristics. The reader “sees the humanity in them (the animals) because of their lack of it” (Holderness, Loughrey, and Yousaff, 1998, p. 33). The few humans discussed in the story play a very slight role and serve only as threats in the background.

Negative undertones play a large role in the formation of the satirical style. “The melodramatized character of the elderly Clover, the formal dance of speeches with their all-too-neat structure, and the final exaggerated irony, all belie the negative pattern of the satire” (Holderness, Loughrey, and Yousaff, 1998, p. 31). The story itself is a very negative parody of Russian communism; Orwell revolves the tale around all that is wrong and destructive in that society. The animals continuously are taken advantage of and are denied the freedom to rule their own lives. In the beginning of the story the farmer is the oppressor, but as the story progresses the animals find themselves at the mercy of the pigs who have assumed all authority. Through the minds of the animals, the reader is engulfed in the negativeness that exists in the story and is trapped by the animals’ limitations. When the pigs begin their oppressive rule, it is done in such a way that the remaining animals’ natural restrictions blind them to the action. The audience finds itself burdened by the unfortunate unfolding of events yet the characters are rendered helpless to desist.
The stylistic devices of preaching and satire are advantageous to the political novel because they attempt to reach individuals with widely opposing ideals and personal viewpoints. Which is more effective depends on the personal tastes and views of the reader. A reader with a preference for "happy ever after" will be more moved and motivated by the preaching style. This type of reader may never pick up a novel such as Animal Farm as a result of its negativeness. This aspect is key to the success of political literature in general. On the other hand, a pessimist or a person with distaste for current society would enjoy and be entertained by a satirical approach. Another suggestion must consider the time period when the novel is read. During the period of slavery in the United States, much emphasis was placed on humanitarian needs and rights. As a result, the novel Uncle Tom's Cabin was immensely successful due to its preaching approach. The people during this time period were accustomed to and familiar with education as well as entertainment through preaching; therefore, Stowe's style was widely received and celebrated. During the tumultuous time following the Second World War, Animal Farm, by George Orwell was published. A satirical approach to the socialist ideology, it was incredibly popular and influential.

Case Study 2: Political Themes

As a result of the unique format of fiction, authors of political literature are free to explore futuristic ideals and societies entirely governed by their own rules and decisions. A popular political theme of this genre, especially in the early half of the twentieth century, is the utopian society. The quest for the perfect and most effective political system encourages many writers to creativity and the political novel allows for both positive and negative exploration.
This particular political theme attempts to educate the audience to the writer’s ideal world while at the same time warning of possible dangers arising from the current situation. Men Like Gods, by H. G. Wells and Brave New World, by Aldous Huxley are two political utopian novels that encouraged reflection of the current society ills while offering suggestions for the future.

In 1932, H. G. Wells published his novel, Men Like Gods. One of his later works, the novel focused on the realization of a utopian society; however, this was not Wells’ first discussion of the subject. Around the beginning of the twentieth century, a transformation in Wells’ work began to appear. He began to “project images of the future which were not merely exciting or terrifying but which contained hopefully constructive suggestions about improvements of the human condition” (Panichas, 1971, p. 6). Wells became a fervent supporter and promoter of the positive utopia, despite having been an anti-utopian writer up to this point. Wells focused not on what the world should become, rather he appeared obsessed with what it might become, “speculating on the possibilities that could descend upon it, and imaginatively transforming it” (Panichas, 1971, p. 4). He began to possess a “reasoned faith in the possibility (and in some moods, the certainty) of human betterment and strove to find a way to “balance the needs of society with those of the individual” (Panichas, 1971, p. 10).

This setting and Wells’ beliefs regarding the future of the world led to the creation of Men Like Gods. The novel depicts the world, as it would appear in the years after the “age of confusion.” An evolved utopian society runs parallel to our current world and as a result of the utopians experimentation the worlds collide for an instance allowing ten individuals from “the age of confusion” (modern society) to enter the utopians world. Thus begins the tale of the ill-fated combination of the two societies. Wells portrays the utopian society as all that is good and wonderful about the world and the elimination of all that is not. He focuses on the positive
aspects throughout and even the horrible behavior of most of the earthlings is downplayed and attributed to matters beyond their individual control. The utopians humbly, yet passionately share with the visitors all that they have achieved and the results are obvious: utopia. However, Wells does not leave his audience convinced that utopia can one day be achieved in our society. The humans bring a deadly virus into the utopian world and are therefore forced into isolation. Toward the end of the novel the extermination of most of the humans occurs due to their own violence and hostilities toward the members of the utopian world. Yet, despite the negative aspects that result from the merger of the two worlds, Wells focuses on the good-hearted individuals and downplays the actions of those with selfish and malicious intentions (Wells, 1932).

The same year that Men Like Gods was published, Aldous Huxley published his novel, Brave New World, an anti-utopian novel, that Huxley hoped would further his view that “stability was the ‘primal and the ultimate need’ if civilization was to survive the present crisis” (Huxley, 1932, p. 1). This present crisis was the Great Depression in the United States and the global depression which it triggered around the world. The increase of scientific knowledge and experimentation at this time fascinated Huxley, and its influence in Brave New World is of utmost importance to the novel’s success. The novel depicts a world where people are created and programmed or conditioned by the state. Science has evolved to the point where natural reproduction is of no use; the state fertilizes, bears, and raises individuals. These individuals are created for particular classes of societies and are conditioned to be efficient as well as content with their roles in life. Privacy is forbidden and education, employment, as well as entertainment are received from the hands of the state directly. In contrast to this “civilization” is the reservation of savages, who continue to live in family-like structures, reproducing and bearing
their own children and worshiping their own gods. As a result of curiosity from one of the programmed and civilized individuals, the reservation is explored and one of their "own" is found living amongst the savages. This individual's half-civilized, half-savage son is encouraged to leave the reservation and reside in the civil society. The introduction of the savage, John, into the civilized world does nothing to shake the balance of civilization; however, it destroys him and he ultimately commits suicide to escape (Huxley, 1932).

*Brave New World* and *Men Like Gods* present examples of the various slants that can be used to enrich political themes in fiction. Wells uses a preaching method, similar to the one Stowe used in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, in order to present a positive slant on the utopian theme. He focuses on positive aspects and ends the novel with all of the characters further enlightened by the circumstances of the story. In contrast to this style, Huxley's novel is very satirical and the negative tone plays an immense role; the novel ends with the savage John's suicide. The novels address a similar topic, though Huxley's utopia appears to be an exact opposite to Wells', "anti-utopia was often concealed in Utopia" (or vice-versa). Even when the anti-utopia took on separate form, it retained the satirical character of utopia and used satirical techniques to attack existing society (Kumar, 1987, p. 105).

Both novels display an extreme discontent with existing society and offer the consequences that may result in the future. The difference is that "Wells' utopia is apolitical or post political: "it assumes that all opposed claims have been brought into harmony and concentrates on describing the technologically efficient and mildly hedonistic society that has come into being" (Panichas, 1971, p. 10). On the other hand, Huxley's outlook focuses on the perils of the current contemporary society: "The air-conditioned nightmare and totalitarian power are still only too evidently features of the contemporary environment (and therefore) lend
substance to the anti-utopian vision” (Kumar, 1987, p. 105). Each novel effectively portrays the author’s ideals regarding society and its future through the utopian theme. The theme is explored using different slants and stylistic devices, which enable the authors to portray their individual views and ideologies.

Case Study 3: Character Development

“For over fifty years, traditional literary criticism has read Shakespeare’s history plays in one of three ways: as overt political texts that can be interpreted by reference to the historical source material, as dramatic entertainment to be compared aesthetically with examples from the more familiar genres of comedy, tragedy, or romance, or as part of a process of personal development…” (Tennenhouse, 1986, p. 109). Each of these various interpretations lends insight into the magic of Shakespeare’s creations and is essential in assessing their value. From a political science viewpoint, the history plays and many of the tragedy plays offer audiences the opportunity not only to explore the politics of the Elizabethan era but also to compare and contrast those politics with the ones of today. Throughout many of Shakespeare’s history plays, particularly in Henry V, Henry IV, Richard II, Richard III, and in his tragedy, Coriolanus, Shakespeare explores the political arena through his characters’ personalities and decisions, through differing circumstances and plots, and through careful emphasis on the importance of power and power holders. As a result of his explorations, audiences are presented with the material necessary to further their individual understanding of the political realm—seemingly without their knowledge—through the entertainment forum of the theatre.

Shakespeare’s plays explore various settings that provide the essential material needed to conduct a thorough analysis of power structures. “Shakespeare’s plays, like Renaissance
'literature,' generally display its politics as idealized or demystified specific forms of power, and that such a display rather than the work's transcendence or referentially was what made it aesthetically successful" (Dollimore and Sinfield, 1994, p. 10). Character power is a central theme in many of Shakespeare's plays. The misuse of power is a key theme in the play, Henry IV which explores contradictory uses of power, in Coriolanus, his mother's quest for power leads to his downfall, and the play, Henry V revolves around the idea that power is the "inevitable unfolding of order" (Tennenhouse, 1986, p. 82).

In Richard II, Shakespeare explores the effect of a powerless or mediocrity powerful leader of the state. King Richard begins the play not relying on his own individual power, but assuming that because he possesses a position of power, he will escape his enemies and continue to reign secure on his throne. He trusts that angels will protect him and fight for his kingdom, that soldiers will arise from stones for the anointed king, and that 'the king's name' is worth 'twenty thousand names' (Holderness, 2000, III.ii.85). Furthermore, he employs the earth to come to his assistance in hindering his enemies:

Feed not thy sovereign's foe, my gentle earth,
Nor with thy sweets comfort his ravenous sense,
But let thy spiders, that suck up thy venom,
And heavy-gaited toads lie in their way,
Doing annoyance to the treacherous feet,
Which with usurping steps do trample thee. (Holderness, 2000, III.ii.12-17)

Shakespeare also uses the character of Richard II in order to delve into the consequences of a king who misuses his power. Much of Richard's downfall arises from his willingness to use the power of his position for selfish reasons and as a result he loses the respect and loyalty of the
people (Tennenhouse, 1986, p. 80). This perspective on Richard’s rule is seen when he uses his power to take the inheritance of Bolingbrook following the death of Richard’s uncle, John of Gaunt (Holderness, 2000, II.i.247).

Shakespeare endows the character of Henry IV with “the power of the artist, not a power detached from matters political, that is, but the power to incorporate disruptive cultural elements within the official rituals of the state” (Tennenhouse, 1986, p. 81). This characteristic allows Henry to enjoy a more successful reign than Richard II, and Shakespeare uses aspects of his play, Henry IV, to contrast the two differing uses of power. Henry uses his position of authority forcefully, in contrast to Richard’s inability to formulate strong decisions and adhere to them. A main aspect of Henry’s strength is his willingness to use his power in contradictory roles. Henry grants the conspirator, Aumerle, asylum despite his plot against Henry; however, Henry forcefully declares his revenge on those who continue against him: “Destruction straight shall dog them at their heels...They shall not live within this world, I swear” (Holderness, 2000, V.iii.139). This ability increases Henry’s strength and gives his subjects reasons to respect him and his enemies to fear him.

In the play, Coriolanus, Shakespeare focuses on the struggle amongst individuals. Coriolanus’ mother, Volumnia, uses her power over her son in order to persuade him to seek a position of political power. However, her quest for power for her son ultimately leads to his banishment and death as a result of the power that various patricians exert over the general populace. Brutus and Sicinius effectively use their positional power in order to manipulate the crowds, who then turn against Coriolanus and call for his banishment (Brown, 2001, p. 346). Following the banishment, Volumnia’s power is once again exerted. She effectively convinces her son not to invade the city and to return home.
The examples from Richard II, Henry IV, and Coriolanus present various different uses of power and examine the imperative role power plays in the political arena. Shakespeare presents a wide range of examples of exertions of power in the midst of his plays in order to assist audiences in evaluating and understanding political and individual power. His history plays seem to reinforce the view that “authority goes to the contender who can seize hold of the symbols and signs legitimizing authority and wrest them from his rivals to make them serve his own interests” (Tennenhouse, 1986, p. 83). This ideology is particularly apparent in Richard II and in Henry IV; however, Shakespeare is not simply trying to force his own views upon his audiences. The wide range of power scenarios enables individual assessment and present the many different facets power can have in the political arena. Through making one’s own assessments and evaluations, Shakespeare’s plays offer an imperative role in increasing an individual’s understanding of power politics in the Elizabethan era as well as in politics today.

Shakespeare not only addresses individual power politics in his works, but also continually presents scenarios showing various political dilemmas, consequences, and outcomes that attempt to further educate as well as entertain his audiences through character exploration. The wide range of political situations explored offer only one constant: Shakespeare’s view of “politics as problematic…and because politics is the art of managing the social world in which we live and attempting to solve its insoluble problems, Shakespeare’s politics is tragic” (Rabkin, 1967, p. 81).

Richard II addresses the dilemma of having an unfit individual as king, an individual whose existence is crucial to maintaining the monarchy, yet whose personal limitations place the monarchy in peril (Rabkin, 1967, p. 82). Richard’s refusal to acknowledge any moral responsibility for his actions enables him to plot the murder of his uncle and this action, much to
his disbelief, contributes to his loss of the throne. Through the loss of the throne by the legitimate heir, Richard places the entire monarchy in danger. Norman Rabkin, author of *Shakespeare and the Common Understanding*, believes that Shakespeare uses this play in order to address the “insoluble problem of history…the dilemma that the new and benign order brought about by the creation of monarchical stability has legitimised in the process of its creation a kind of permanent challenge to the crown that will ultimately destroy the kingship itself” (Rabkin, 1967, p. 84). This statement suggests that the position of power ultimately defines the characteristics of the leader, despite the initial personality, goal, or ideology.

In *Coriolanus*, Shakespeare contrasts two opposing views of a political society, neither of which offers a positive outlook. He explores the ethical and moral characteristics or lack thereof, of political officials and the consequences of these characteristics. Shakespeare presents the character Coriolanus who appears willing to accept public office not for personal gain, but in fulfillment of his duty to the state; however, Coriolanus is banished from the city as a result of his honesty and unwillingness to bend to the political norm. In contrast to Coriolanus’ character, the other city officials who willingly mold themselves to the satisfaction of the general public, while secretly fulfilling their own selfish needs and desires, easily manipulate the populace into banishing one of the few honest and worthwhile individuals. Through the play, *Coriolanus*, Shakespeare offers the audience two political scenarios, “the idea of the state as unbending moral imperative and the idea of the state as a community organized for the benefit of its members—on the one hand, the state as worthy of allegiance only when it represents the highest moral ideals; on the other, ‘my country right or wrong’” (Rabkin, 1967, p. 139).

Shakespeare also addresses contradictions and illusions throughout many of his political works. *Coriolanus* offers the audience the ability to assess the actions seen behind the scenes as
well as those presented to the populace. The officials present the illusion of being for the people, while privately they admit to acting for their own selfishness. In *Julius Caesar*, Shakespeare "offers a deliberate contrast between the person and the public persona, the face and the mask; that tragic illusion and error are shown to spring from the wrenching apart of the two worlds—the personal and the public" (Knights, 1965, p. 14). The public is never offered a clear and unbiased view of the actual circumstances; instead, they are constantly fed the manipulations of the various characters' agendas.

The circumstances, themes, and plots found in Shakespeare's political plays create a 'play world' for the audience to analyze and interpret; inside this 'play world,' there exist characters who carry the storyline from one excerpt to the next. These characters combine to emphasize the importance of the individual and their personal actions in the midst of the political arena. Shakespeare's careful and meticulous character development enables the audience to assess the importance of the individual in politics and to understand their relevance as a result of the roles of individual characters in the plays. Coriolanus' personality and his moral and truthful virtues are essential elements of the play; *Coriolanus*, revolves around the role his personality plays in the political system. Shakespeare uses his characters not as extensions of his own voice, but as means for representing the differing facets of the political system (Kettle, 1964, p. 82).

Ultimately, fiction is seen as a means of entertainment, whether it is in the form of a novel or theatrical production. Shakespeare's essential desire was to entertain; however, he excelled at educating in the midst of his entertainment, particularly through his political plays. According to L. C. Knights, political theorist and author of *Public Voices: Literature and Politics with Special Reference to the 17th Century*, "what literature continually brings home to us is the
value of the individual consciousness and the living moment” Shakespeare’s political fiction does the same, simply from the view of the political arena (Knights, 1971, p. 12). Through his work, Shakespeare was able to bring politics to life; he explored various facets and scenarios and invited his audience to make their own judgments and deductions. He presents an emotional aspect rarely seen in the political arena by creating male characters, such as Marc Antony, Brutus, and Caesar who exhibit deep feelings and are placed in intricate and complicated relationships (Knights, 1971, p. 18). Shakespeare impresses upon his audiences his belief that politics is essentially a complicated network of personal relationships and invites the audience to contemplate the implications that arise from these various relationships. Ideally, he seems to hope that through an understanding and appreciation of his political plays, the audience will grasp his belief “that a wholesome political order is not something arbitrary and imposed, but an expression of relationships between particular persons within an organic society” (Knights, 1965, p. 23).

Politics is a vast and complicated part of today’s world and held a similar role in Shakespeare’s time. Different scenarios under different governments can produce varying results often with little indication as to the underlying foundations. Individual actions are oftentimes indecipherable and confusing and yet they play an imperative role in any political system. The political power structure is a key aspect of politics that is at times largely overlooked by the general populace. Power struggles are often responsible for disruptions and chaos, yet it is often difficult to identify those involved in the struggle and the reasoning behind it. Throughout his many political plays, both historical and tragic, Shakespeare manages to bring light to the many intricacies of the political arena and presents the political system in a format that is open to interpretation and that invites audience members to make their own deductions. His plays
provide various settings, which allow for power analysis, various outcomes and consequences that encourage exploration, character analysis that enforces the importance of the individual, and ultimately increase understanding of the political system as a result. In the end,

"play will not stay in place. That is its vitality, its charm, its danger—especially so in Shakespeare’s plays, with the irony and openness of their closures. It is true that they are material products with a material history of their own, that they are cultural products whose evaluation has a history of its own; but their interest for us is not confined to the light they cast on the past...(Shakespeare’s plays) invite us to play across the boundaries of time and space. They bring history itself into play, and do so by the very nature of their fictive method" (Holderness, Potter, and Turner, 1990, p. 12).

Conclusion

Political fiction is a means of conveying information to an audience. An author chooses such a format in order to pursue individual ideologies and theories and relay them to others. The works discussed in this essay have influenced diverse audiences since their creation. Their effectiveness is a result of the specific stylistic, thematic, and character decisions made by the authors. Uncle Tom’s Cabin was an enormous success, because it conveyed information in a style that was familiar and interesting to its audience. Its sentimental appeal allowed Stowe to pursue her political agenda and to encourage others to see things her way. Additionally, the preaching style furthered the support she was seeking and her “congregation” felt enlightened by her story. Animal Farm was successful for similar reasons. The time period at the end of the Second World War encouraged the negative and satirical slant of communism portrayed by Orwell and the audiences received the novel with a perverse satisfaction. The utopian novels, Men Like Gods and Brave New World, by Wells and Huxley respectively, were fruitful because they were utopian novels. The futuristic theme allowed each author free reign in his thought process and gave them the opportunity to promote their political agendas in an unstructured and
open format, unfettered and unbound by restrictions that a novel set in a realistic current society would face. Shakespeare's intense character exploration and description allowed his audiences insight into the decisions, mistakes, and successes of his characters. His depiction of the role of the individual in the political arena educated and informed his audiences of the importance of the individual, often encouraging them to become involved in their own political societies.

Each of these categories and the specific novels discussed represents a facet of the genre of political literature. Its diversity is unique and creates an outlet for almost any type of individual. Of course there are disadvantages to using the political novel as a medium for presenting information. Animal Farm has often been misinterpreted and critics today still question the feasibility of using a fairy story to portray a satire of Russian communism. Uncle Tom's Cabin was ridiculed by citizens of the southern white communities for its pious portrayal of slaves and was deemed misleading. Stowe's answer to the slave problem was not widely received and was not considered a feasible option to either blacks or whites, a characteristic of her novel that led many to doubt its credibility. Wells and Huxley found that their novels were not always taken seriously as political propaganda and for some readers, Men Like Gods and Brave New World were reduced to the genre of ordinary science fiction. Shakespeare found a similar response to his political plays; too often they were regarded as simple entertainment. However, despite these misinterpretations and haphazard identifications, political fiction remains an effective and desired means of education and propagandizing, reaching, and enriching various audiences throughout the world.

Political literature may at times be as shocking and unconventional as a "pistol shot in the middle of a concert;" however, this aspect is simply part of its appeal. Ideas are spread and digested through an entertainment medium that encourages all to participate and analyze. These
abstract ideas are the heart and soul of the political novel, even though critics herald that “abstract ideas invariably contaminate a work of art and should be kept at a safe distance from it.” Yet, “ideas, be they in free isolation or hoped into formal systems, are indispensable to the serious novel. For in modern society ideas raise enormous charges of emotion, they involve us in our most feverish commitments and lead us to our most fearful betrayals. The political novelist may therefore have to take greater risks than most others, as must any artist who uses large quantities of impure matter” (Wilding, 1980, p. 3). This “impure matter” is the key to the political novel, for in its use is the opportunity for the authors to create and the audience to learn.
Bibliography


