

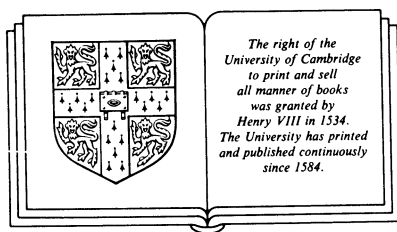
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EUGENE GOODHEART



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Preface

Pieces of Resistance is a collection of essays and essay-reviews written over a period of twenty-five years, 1960–85. It responds to the political, cultural, and literary changes that occurred during that period as these changes expressed themselves in the writings of novelists and critics and in the “personalities” of certain influential magazines. The exemplary figures are Lionel Trilling, Philip Rahv, and V. S. Naipaul, among others, that is, writers with a particular sensitivity to ideological tendencies in the literary imagination and the cultural life that distort and diminish our understanding of the world. My own critical stance shares their resistance to these tendencies, hence the title of my collection. The journals that I discuss are *The New York Review*, *Commentary*, and *The Evergreen Review*, which over the years and particularly in the late sixties and early seventies provided illuminating intersections of political, cultural, and literary themes. Eros, radical politics, pornography, avant-gardism, racism, and Stalinism are among the themes that crop up in various forms in these essays, themes of continuing interest.

Not all the essays in this collection are polemical. A number of essays – for instance, those on Bashevis Singer, Daniel Fuchs, and Meyer Liben – are interpretations of works of imagination that speak to personal experience and have moved me. Fuchs and Liben are not writers central to American literary life, but they have a power and charm that deserve serious consideration. Some of the themes in the more polemical pieces are, to be sure, present in these essays. In the short pieces on Donald Barthelme and Raymond Carver I have tried to capture the ways in which they represent the quality of our lives: their “realism,” so to speak.

The book, for all its diversity, is of a piece. It is criticism of a kind that not only looks at a work or event closely but tries to see in the work or event a larger cultural and political significance. Nor does it pretend to an impersonal objectivity. The historical moment, present

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as well as past, and personal experience condition the critical act. Criticism, as I understand and practice it, is evaluative as well as interpretative. My commitment to evaluation is not a naive holdover of an obsolete mode of criticism but a deliberate response to current ways of thinking about literature that put in doubt the evaluative function of criticism.

I have made only small stylistic changes and revisions, preserving the substance of the essays, even where I am no longer in precise agreement. The long essay on Naipaul, which concludes the book, represents a conflation of two separate essays on this remarkable writer, originally printed in *Salmagundi* and *Partisan Review*.

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I would also like to thank Morris Dickstein and Mark Schechner for their extremely useful suggestions about what to include and what to exclude. Both of them helped me discover the abiding concerns in these occasional pieces.