In his autobiography *Long Walk to Freedom*, Nelson Mandela describes himself as an avid reader of political, philosophical and fictional literature. Denys Reitz's *Commando*, he says, gave him an insight into the unconventional guerrilla strategies employed by Boer generals during the Anglo-Boer War (1994: 197). Edgar Snow's *Red Star Over China* enlightened him on Mao's determination and unconventional thinking, which led to his triumph. Menachem Begin's *The Revolt* also inspired him, as it presents the successful insurrections led by an Israeli leader in a country devoid of mountains and forests (313). Mandela also drew inspiration for his immigration policy from Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*; Tolstoy's *War and Peace* gave him an insight into international relations (558). In French-speaking Africa, Thomas Sankara appears as an example of the impact of literature, particularly fiction, on the training of leaders. In an interview with Elisabeth Nicolini, published in 1986 by *Jeune Afrique*, Sankara expressed his dissatisfaction with many African writers for their lack of authenticity and realism. He preferred authors who tackled social issues, as demonstrated by his admiration for Lenin's seminal work, *The State and Revolution*. Similarly, since coming to power in 2016, Benin's President Patrice Talon has forged a deep bond with authors and fiction books, using them to shape his political vision. In 2016, for instance, he requested renowned Beninese writer, Sophie Adonon, to provide him with all of her works, particularly those that were personally autographed. His passion for literature is apparent in numerous speeches and political endeavors; he emphasizes it clearly. This fondness for literature has been pivotal in shaping his leadership style and governance approach, as he believes that "literature presents the societal issues in a unique manner" (Talon, 2021).

And yet, in his response to Sartre's famous call for literary engagement, Theodore Adorno (1992) asserted that art "does not consist in proposing alternatives, but in resisting, solely through artistic form, the course of the world that continues to hold a gun to men's heads" (78). The political character of a literary work, according to Adorno, lies not in any political program or partisan affiliation it might assume, but precisely in its resistance to any program that appropriates it for its own ends. This aligns with Maurice Blanchot's concept of literature's intrinsic "bad faith," which enables it to capture historical and political conflicts while simultaneously disavowing its factual nature when approached seriously. In essence, the interpretation of a work of fiction is always ambiguous as it operates within the realm of irony. Blanchot argues that this ambiguity, in response to Sartre's idea of committed literature, marks a critical moment in literature and underpins its fundamental duplicity. He writes: "Literature is language that transforms itself into ambiguity, and it asserts itself as an ever-different possibility" (1948: 113). In other words, literature always means more than we are ready to
recognize, and can always go beyond our assignments. Indeed, as Derrida (2000) points out, literature can say it all, accept it all, receive it all, undergo it all, and simulate it all. This ambiguity of literary writing, its recourse to fictionality and simulation, is what constitutes literature's specific resistance, continually preserving the otherness of a literary text. Literature is intricately linked to the world, yet it also maintains a degree of detachment that enables it to envision alternative realities, particularly when viewed through the lens of future historical perspectives that may not align with its original context and intended audience. Thus, if literature is tied to a promise contained in Derrida's notion of "democracy to come" (1996: 47), the right to literature seems to be synonymous with democracy and freedom of expression; which not only guarantees our right to say anything, but also implies, more crucially, our right to disclaim responsibility for what is said. This way of linking literature to political action is summed up by the concept of "indirection" proposed by Hannah Arendt (2007), who shows how the works of Melville and Dostoyevsky map out routes of action capable of responding to the "social question". From this perspective, literature is said to have the capacity to enable politicians to understand and solve complex problems more effectively. As a result, fiction would be seen as perfect, capable of representing the Absolute Good - or its opposite, given that every interpretation is ironic and reversible, although this is not the case for all readers (Eco, 1994). In any case, literature would offer politicians what Bourdieu describes in Les Règles de l'art as "mediation" (1992: 78), enabling the reader to build bridges between the internal and the external, and thus projecting the cultural and political normative implications of the work.

Thus posited, we can assume that the relationship between governors and literature shows that the latter contributes, directly or indirectly, to the very articulation of governance and governmentality. By the same token, writers construct their work by conferring on it the possibility of intervention in political praxis, so that literature becomes to politics what politics is to literature: political action, a site of resistance and ideological construction.

This issue of Mouvances Francophones seeks to understand the strategic role of literary works in shaping political action. The focus is on how literature shapes the construction of leadership, political vision, governance strategies and political action, on the one hand, and, on the other, how writers construct their works precisely within political thought, so that the literary text becomes the representation or deconstruction of a political program.

**Topics**

Lines of thought, without being exhaustive could include:

- Literature as a political program
- Literature and political branding/marketing
- Literature as an exercise in democracy
- Literature and the construction of political leadership
- Politicians' literary genres, authors and themes
- Literary genres and political issues
- Writers' politics and ideologies
- The conversion of writers into politicians and vice versa
- Friendships or animosities between politicians and writers
- The political writer and the politician as writer
- The critical reception of writers and the influence of politicians
- Memoirs and (auto)biographies of politicians
- Women’s writings on their relationship with politicians
- Writers and political censorship
- Politic(ian)s and literary trials

Submission Guidelines

Proposals (titled abstracts of around 300 words, followed by a brief bio-bibliography) in French or English should be sent to politeramf12025@yahoo.com, no later than June 15, 2024.

Important Dates

Submission of proposals (abstracts): June 15, 2024
Notification of authors: July 1, 2024
Submission of articles: November 1, 2024
Return of double-blind peer-reviewed articles: December 30, 2024
Submission of corrected articles: January 30, 2025
Publication of thematic issue: early February 2025
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