1979

Toward a Workers' America: the Theory and Practice of the American Proletarian Novel, Based Upon Four Selected Works.

Joel Dudley Wingard

Louisiana State University and Agricultural & Mechanical College

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_disstheses

Recommended Citation


https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_disstheses/3425

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at LSU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in LSU Historical Dissertations and Theses by an authorized administrator of LSU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact gradetd@lsu.edu.
INFORMATION TO USERS

This was produced from a copy of a document sent to us for microfilming. While the most advanced technological means to photograph and reproduce this document have been used, the quality is heavily dependent upon the quality of the material submitted.

The following explanation of techniques is provided to help you understand markings or notations which may appear on this reproduction.

1. The sign or “target” for pages apparently lacking from the document photographed is “Missing Page(s)”. If it was possible to obtain the missing page(s) or section, they are spliced into the film along with adjacent pages. This may have necessitated cutting through an image and duplicating adjacent pages to assure you of complete continuity.

2. When an image on the film is obliterated with a round black mark it is an indication that the film inspector noticed either blurred copy because of movement during exposure, or duplicate copy. Unless we meant to delete copyrighted materials that should not have been filmed, you will find a good image of the page in the adjacent frame.

3. When a map, drawing or chart, etc., is part of the material being photographed the photographer has followed a definite method in “sectioning” the material. It is customary to begin filming at the upper left hand corner of a large sheet and to continue from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps. If necessary, sectioning is continued again—beginning below the first row and continuing on until complete.

4. For any illustrations that cannot be reproduced satisfactorily by xerography, photographic prints can be purchased at additional cost and tipped into your xerographic copy. Requests can be made to our Dissertations Customer Services Department.

5. Some pages in any document may have indistinct print. In all cases we have filmed the best available copy.
WINGARD, JOEL DUDLEY
TOWARD A WORKERS' AMERICA: THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF THE AMERICAN PROLETARIAN NOVEL, BASED UPON FOUR SELECTED WORKS.

THE LOUISIANA STATE UNIVERSITY AND AGRICULTURAL AND MECHANICAL COL., PH.D., 1979
TOWARD A WORKERS' AMERICA:  
THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF  
THE AMERICAN PROLETARIAN NOVEL,  
BASED UPON FOUR SELECTED WORKS

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
in  
The Department of English

by  
Joel Dudley Wingard  
B.A., Muskingum College, 1968  
M.A., Old Dominion University, 1973  
August, 1979
Acknowledgments

I am grateful to my dissertation director, Dr. Darwin Shrell, for guiding and encouraging me through the preparation of my dissertation, and for his serenity in giving that help under the burden of his duties as department chairman. I am also grateful to Dr. Lewis P. Simpson for his editorial acumen and his patience despite the heavy load of his own work. I wish to thank Dr. Burl Noggle of the History Department of Louisiana State University, not only for serving on my dissertation committee, but for awakening me to the literary life of the thirties and for encouraging my earliest efforts with this project. I also wish to thank Dr. Max Webb for his many insights into Proletarian literature, for his very helpful suggestions regarding sources and approaches for my dissertation, and for his sensitivity to the radical cause, which has repeatedly rejuvenated my belief in the value of studying Proletarian literature. Finally, I am grateful to Dr. Nicholas Canaday for his service on my dissertation committee, to Mrs. Anna Perrault, Mrs. Jane Kleiner, and Mrs. Barbara Prunty of the Louisiana State University library staff for helping me obtain materials for my research, and to Mrs. Ruth Barnes for her invaluable aid as my typist.
**Table of Contents**

Acknowledgments .............................................. ii
Abstract ................................................................ iv

Introduction ................................................... 1

Chapter

  I. The Background and Development
     of the Proletarian Literary Movement ............ 9
  II. The Theory of the Proletarian Novel ............ 50
  III. The Proletarian Novel in Practice .............. 91

      Jews Without Money .................................... 99
      The Disinherited ................................... 120
      The Land of Plenty .................................. 143
      Studs Lonigan ....................................... 158

  IV. Conclusion ............................................. 192

Bibliography ................................................. 224
Vita
Abstract

In the early years of the Great Depression, numerous American writers and critics "went Left," in some cases joining the Communist Party, in most cases becoming "fellow travelers" sympathetic with Marxist politics. Their increased politicization inspired them to attempt to enlist their craft in the service of society in those troubled times, specifically to use art as a weapon in the class struggle. This radical sensibility engendered a coherent body of critical theory on two subjects: the role of the literary artist in helping to hasten the proletarian revolution and to shape the proletarian culture of the future, and the nature of "Proletarian literature." It also spawned some seventy novels between 1930 and 1939. Both the critics and the novelists assumed the instrumental value of literature. The revolutionary or Proletarian literary movement of the thirties was unusual in twentieth century American literary history in attempting to involve the man of letters in the socio-political sphere and in promoting the fusion of the literary artist-as-artist and artist-as-man.

Comparatively little critical and scholarly attention has been paid to the Proletarian literary movement in America.
This dissertation examines the background of that movement in terms of its roots in both the nineteenth century theory of the writer in a democracy propounded by Emerson and Whitman and the amalgam of radicalism and Bohemianism that flourished especially in the salons and flats of Greenwich Village immediately before and after World War I. It also analyzes the more immediate causes of twenties discontent with bourgeois America and of early Depression conditions which drove writers to the Left. This study also collates the theoretical criticism about the Proletarian writer and the Proletarian novel that appeared in such Leftist journals as New Masses, Modern Quarterly, and Partisan Review from the late twenties, when it first began to coalesce into a revolutionary sensibility, until the time of the First American Writers' Congress in April of 1935. The Proletarian literary movement reached a pinnacle at that moment. Soon afterward, forces within the movement in America as well as the shift in Comintern policy from the militant Third Period stance to the more ecumenical position of the Popular Front policy combined to deflect and weaken the drive for the creation of an American Proletarian literature.

This study treats four representative Proletarian novels: Michael Gold's Jews Without Money, Jack Conroy's The Disinherited, Robert Cantwell's The Land of Plenty, and James T. Farrell's Studs Lonigan. It considers them in terms of the rhetorical use of fiction in the service of a political end—
to describe aspects of American life as revealing the class struggle and to move readers to revolutionary class-consciousness. The novels are also examined in light of the prescriptions of Leftist critical theory, to show the variety of approaches attempted according to different novelists' conceptions of their literary and political tasks.

This study concludes that there is a good deal of variety in the Proletarian novel, both as to literary practice and achievement, contrary to the general critical opinion that the politically-motivated fiction of the thirties is a uniform lump of indistinguishable propagandistic tracts. It also attempts to place the radical sensibility of the thirties and the Proletarian novel back into the context of the American literary tradition, to argue that it was more broadly humanistic in its emphases than pointedly Marxian and thus an integral part of that tradition and not the result of foreign influences at work during a time of national instability.
Introduction

This study of the theory and practice of the American Proletarian novel in the early Depression years will examine a minor but significant movement in American letters. In those years many American writers and critics "went Left"--adopted a Marxist view of history, economics, politics, and literature--and, if they did not join the Communist Party outright, became fellow travelers. Such writers and critics joined an already-existing Leftist minority in American letters and, for a brief period of five or six years, the newly-expanded Left produced and promoted the phenomenon known either as Revolutionary or Proletarian literature. In addition, the writers and critics who adopted the Marxist orientation during these years contributed to the Leftist theoretical criticism of the role and form of the novel and the function of the novelist. Such criticism, published in Leftist magazines throughout the twenties, attracted little attention outside of the small circle of radicals in American letters. But as the appeal of the Marxist vision of life and literature widened to encompass more and more writers and intellectuals who had previously been politically uncommitted, several effects became noticeable. The John
Reed Clubs were founded to encourage and develop revolutionary writers. Critical discussion of literature from the Leftist point of view spread to such liberal magazines as The New Republic and The Nation. New Leftist journals for the promulgation of Marxist literary theory and the publication of new Proletarian writers appeared. Some seventy Proletarian novels were published, and in general, American letters saw a new attention given to the instrumental value of literature.

The culmination of the Proletarian literary movement was the First American Writers' Congress, held in New York in April, 1935, under the auspices of the American Communist Party. This meeting attracted not just party members but prominent literary men from across the whole Leftist spectrum. Its widespread publicity and open atmosphere indicate the respectability Marxism had attained by 1935. However, at the same time as Marxism in literature was reaching the moment of its most widespread influence and interest in America, other events, together with the very broadening of the Leftist movement, were combining to effect the reversal of the movement's popular appeal. Faced with the growing threat of Fascism in Spain and Germany in the spring of 1935, the Soviet Communist Party decided to shift emphasis from the promotion of the international proletarian revolution to the formation of a united front against Fascism and imperialistic war. This Popular Front policy greatly broadened the criteria for judging "acceptable" political positions;
now one need not be actively revolutionary to be considered an ally of the proletariat; one need only be "anti-fascist." Thus Socialists, "anarcho-syndicalists," "deviationists," liberals, and others who had previously been ideologically unacceptable were welcomed. This more moderate "line" also allowed the Communists to parade their new-found comrades before the public and achieve a kind of innocence by association. Thus the Popular Front policy had great public relations value in the United States, and the American Communist Party was quick to take advantage of the generally softened public attitude. At the Second American Writers' Congress in 1937, the main attraction was Ernest Hemingway, now welcomed as an ally in the common struggle against Fascism, whereas earlier he had been shunned by the Left as a bourgeois writer. But the very public relations success of the Popular Front effectively wrecked the Proletarian literary movement. While the Leftist literary movement in the United States did not "take orders from Moscow," it did reflect the Comintern's shifts in policy and emphasis inasmuch as its ideological guiding lights were sensitive to Soviet positions. Even prior to 1935, Leftist writers and critics had had a difficult time agreeing on the scope of the definition of the Proletarian novel and novelist. After the adoption of the Popular Front policy, the American Left was urged to embrace any writer whose work was anti-Fascist. To do so was to so broaden the definition of "Proletarian" as applied to novels and novelists as to make it useless. The
movement no longer had a fixed center around which to operate. Furthermore, the new emphasis led to the exclusion of the more purely "proletarian" writers—unknowns from the working class or ardent revolutionists—from the pages of the Leftist magazines in favor of "name" writers who lent respectability but whose only qualification for inclusion was a demonstrable anti-fascism. In this fashion a literary movement was sacrificed to political expediency.¹

For the purposes of this study, I am interested in the "purer" form of the Proletarian novel, the novel with a revolutionary rather than merely anti-fascist purpose. Consequently, my attention is limited to novels produced between 1930 and the first half of 1935.

Defining the term "proletarian novel" precisely is difficult. Within the Leftist movement itself there was considerable dispute over what was and was not a Proletarian novel. Some critics maintained that Proletarian literature could be produced only by class-conscious workers themselves and could concern only the lives of proletarians. Others argued that the class origin of the writer did not matter, nor did his subject matter; it was his political orientation that determined whether his work was Proletarian. An even more liberal definition admitted novels written by bourgeois

¹ An interesting and informative discussion of the undoing of the Proletarian movement by political interference is found in an article written by one of the best of the Leftist critics, Philip Rahv. "Proletarian Literature: A Political Autopsy," Southern Review, OS 5 (1939), 616-28.
writers who had no conscious intention of revealing the situation of the revolutionary proletariat but whose works made such a revelation nonetheless. To some extent a critic's definition of Proletarian literature corresponded to the degree of his political dogmatism, but when with the Popular Front policy the Communist Party opened its arms to officially embrace the work of writers such as Theodore Dreiser and even Ernest Hemingway, the definition was liberalized too much to be meaningful. The novels selected for study here were all written during the period (1930-1935) when there was at least a workable, if not universally-held, definition of Proletarian novel. In this context, "Proletarian novel" may be taken to mean any long work of narrative fiction written to illustrate Marxist concepts about the class struggle, including the condition of both the proletariat and the bourgeoisie under capitalism, and evincing the Marxist vision—whether rigidly doctrinaire or merely as it was popularly understood by Leftist writers—on the part of the writer. A novel like Hemingway's To Have and Have Not, though it contains the vaguely Marxist message that "a man alone ain't got no bloody fucking chance,"\(^2\) is not to be considered a Proletarian novel, nor is one like John Steinbeck's In Dubious Battle. Though Steinbeck's novel employs a device popular with Proletarian novelists—the strike—and though it deals sympathetically with workers,

\(^2\) Ernest Hemingway, To Have and Have Not (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1937), p. 225.
it evinces no Marxist viewpoint on the author's part. On the other hand, a work like James T. Farrell's *Studs Lonigan* trilogy, though it concerns only petty bourgeois characters, is Proletarian because it presents those characters in the light of the Marxist understanding of the causes for social behavior.

While I will consider only novels written between 1930 and 1935, my coverage of Proletarian theoretical criticism will be extended further back in time, inasmuch as important critical statements made in the twenties, in V. F. Calverton's *Modern Quarterly* and Michael Gold's *New Masses*, anticipate the appearance of the Proletarian novel. As to the procedure employed in this study, I intend to examine, first, the theory of the Proletarian novel as propounded by Leftist literary critics, and, second, the practice of the Proletarian novel as represented by four selected novels: Michael Gold's *Jews Without Money* (1930), Jack Conroy's *The Disinherited* (1933), Robert Cantwell's *The Land of Plenty* (1934), and James T. Farrell's *Studs Lonigan* trilogy (1932, '34, '35). My purpose in studying these novels will be to show how Proletarian novelists used the devices of fiction to serve the specific political ends which were considered to be the correct purpose of the Proletarian novel. Although the 1930's in American literature are still generally considered a poor sister to the 1920's, the publication of such recent studies as James Gilbert's *Writers and Partisans* (John Wiley, 1968), Richard Pells' *Radical Visions and American Dreams* (Harper
and Row, 1973), and William Stott's *Documentary Expression and Thirties America* (Oxford University Press, 1973), as well as Malcolm Cowley's recollections and reflections in *And I Worked at the Writer's Trade* (Viking, 1978), indicates a growing interest in the period. Together with earlier works such as Daniel Aaron's history of the involvement of twentieth-century American men of letters in radical politics, *Writers on the Left*, and Walter Rideout's survey of *The Radical Novel in the United States, 1900-1954*, these books enrich our understanding of that most curious decade in recent American history, literary and otherwise. But as yet no attempt has been made to collate the literary theory that involvement in radical politics generated in the thirties and even earlier, and no concentrated study has been made of the literature of the thirties in terms of its avowedly political aims. This dissertation seeks to at least partially fill that void. My critical purpose will be primarily descriptive, not interpretive or explanatory. Art was a weapon in the class struggle, and the Proletarian novel was to promote the Revolution. There were, of course, several means to this general end, and no one believed that reading a Proletarian novel would cause a worker immediately to take up arms and revolt. But there did exist on the literary Left a common belief in the service of literature to purposes beyond aesthetic ends. And in this belief the writers and critics in the Leftist literary movement, for a brief period anyway, stood counter to the prevailing opinion of modern literary
theory--dating from Pater in England and James in America--that literature must be basically aesthetic in nature.
Chapter I

The Background and Development of the Proletarian Literary Movement

Leftist literary theories of the role of the novelist and the purpose of the novel are best approached by considering the set of causes that resulted in the Proletarian novel. The aims and methods of the Proletarian novel were shaped by the current of ideas existing at the time, and those ideas in turn were part of a larger ideational context. While the attention of this study is primarily limited to the theory and practice of the Proletarian novel in the early 1930's, it should be kept in mind that that body of theory and practice--obscure though it may be in relation to the literature of the Lost Generation or to that of the Southern Renaissance, to cite two of the more prominent categories of twentieth century American literature--did not occur in isolation or even in obscurity. Indeed the Proletarian movement may have been short-lived and doomed from the start because of inherent contradictions and its subjection to partisan politics, and the movement may have amounted to little more than a curious aberration in the dominant trend of literary theory and practice in the United States in this century, mixing up
as it did literature and politics and socio-economic theory, but then the Depression itself may be viewed as an aberration in the general trend of the country's economic development. In this aberrant period many events exceptional to the dominant trend in American life occurred. For one thing the membership of the American Communist Party increased substantially: from fewer than 10,000 members in 1929 to 14,000 in 1932, to 24,500 in 1934, and to 41,000 by 1936.¹ The Party's candidates in the Presidential election of 1932 received nearly 103,000 votes.² An even more startling development was the publication of an "open letter" to artists, writers, intellectuals and professional men by fifty-two artists and intellectuals, including such established figures as Sherwood Anderson, Malcolm Cowley, John Dos Passos, Erskine Caldwell, and Edmund Wilson, announcing their support for the Communist Party. These same writers subsequently formed the League of Professional Writers for Foster and Ford, the Communist Party candidates for President and Vice-President. The involvement of writers and intellectuals in American politics was nothing new, but the unsolicited participation of so many such men on behalf of so radical a party as the Communist was indeed unusual and not to be repeated until the height of the


anti-Vietnam War movement of the late sixties. For a time, then, and for a significant portion of the American intelligentsia, to be "Red" was, if not conventional, certainly respectable. In fact, as the Left had it, Marxism and only Marxism offered a political vision congenial to the humanistic ethos of writers and intellectuals. The Proletarian novel was among the foremost literary products of such a climate, and as such it is not fully understood without some appreciation for that climate.

The foundation stone on which the Proletarian literary movement of the 1930's was built was already in place at the time of the 1929 Crash. This foundation was made up of the literary Leftists who were the inheritors of the earliest tradition of American post-industrial radicalism--Socialism. These Leftists developed the original critical theory out of which the Proletarian novel grew, and they produced two literary journals which published the most extensive Marxist theoretical criticism in the twenties and early thirties. The New Masses was the step-child of the earlier radicalism which had produced The Masses as a literary organ in 1911. Max Eastman became editor in late 1912, and from the first issue in 1913 until the magazine was suppressed by the government through the treason trials of Eastman, the associate editor Floyd Dell, and others in 1918, The Masses published

---

3 For information on the history of the American literary Left in this section I am indebted to the standard work on the subject, Daniel Aaron's Writers on the Left (1961; rpt. New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), Chapters 1-4, 6 and 7.
stories, poems, cartoons, and political and social satire of an irreverent nature in the spirit of pre-War Bohemianism and Socialism. After the demise of The Masses, The Liberator, under the editorship of Eastman and Dell, succeeded as the leading voice of the American Left in literary matters, although its format included more social and political material than The Masses. In financial trouble in 1922, the editors, who now included Michael Gold, turned the magazine over to the Communist Party, which continued to publish it for several years. However, when the magazine became an official party organ, its previous independent artistic orientation was lost, along with its peculiar vitality, leaving emerging artists of radical persuasion without a forum for the publication of their work. Furthermore, as control of The Liberator passed into the hands of political functionaries, the radical literary men who had composed the editorial staff began to drift away. But still desirous of publishing a radical magazine of literary orientation after the model of the original Masses, a group of radical artist-intellectuals approached the Garland Fund in 1925 with a proposal for a new non-partisan radical magazine. After some hesitation on the part of the Fund's administrators, who wanted the sponsors of the new magazine to match fifty percent of the Garland Fund's grant, and after a shuffle of editors, The New Masses was born in early 1926 under the joint editorship of Mike Gold and Joseph Freeman. For the next few years, New Masses attempted a sort of radical cosmopolitanism,
undoctrinaire and embracing both socialism and liberalism. But this middle way became increasingly hard to tread because of assaults from both wings of American radicalism and because uncertain editorial policies did little to give the magazine the kind of decisive character that might win it a larger audience and keep it financially solvent. In financial trouble again in 1928, the New Masses appealed once more to the Garland Fund for another subsidy, on the condition that the magazine would be reorganized and would make a more concentrated effort to build a solid base of subscribers, which meant, among other things, focusing more narrowly on revolutionary literature. The subsidy was granted, Gold became sole editor, and "the magazine became what Gold had always wanted it to be: a revolutionary organ dedicated to the working class,"4 less slick, exclusive of "big name" writers, and encouraging "the raw materials of the workers' art"; in case a "proletarian genius" should arrive, New Masses would be "ready for him."5

If New Masses and its predecessors represented the "establishment" on the literary Left, V. F. Calverton's Baltimore-based Modern Quarterly was something of a maverick outsider, inasmuch as it remained an independent radical magazine from its founding in 1923. For roughly ten years Calverton published the work of all manner of Leftists, from Earl Browder

4 Aaron, p. 204.
5 New Masses, 4 (July, 1928), 2.
to Edmund Wilson, and his own critical essays were important contributions to the developing theory of the Proletarian novel. Calverton himself, who had been a militant socialist in his early publishing days, moved closer to the Communist Party in the middle twenties when he joined the Workers' Party. He was hailed for the publication of *The Newer Spirit* by Mike Gold in *The Daily Worker* in 1925, and he made a successful visit to the Soviet Union in 1927. Throughout the twenties, Calverton tried to maintain *Modern Quarterly* as an independent forum for various radical viewpoints while arguing his own brand of Marxism in his columns. But eventually Calverton paid the price for his ideological independence: he was discovered to have "Trotskyist" and "social-fascist" tendencies by the Soviet Communists, was denounced in the American Communist press, and was finally excoriated in *New Masses* in 1933, after which *Modern Quarterly* became off-limits for orthodox Marxists, and its previously heavy stream of contributors virtually dried up. Nevertheless, in 1929 *Modern Quarterly* and *New Masses* were two strong, steady, and well-established voices on the literary Left, and as the career of *New Masses* especially shows, the official expression of American literary radicalism became more specific and pointed, moving from genial Bohemianism with a political tinge to an ardent revolutionary consciousness; from a concern with nearly anything that pained the "Puritans"--Freudianism, Feminism, Socialism--to a more narrow concern with the proletarian revolution. In part, this is explainable by the interposition
of the October Revolution and the establishment of the Soviet state, which served to crystallize previously amorphous Leftism into Bolshevism. In part, it is explainable by the rise of certain personages—Mike Gold, for instance—to prominence on the literary Left, and the decline of others—Max Eastman and Floyd Dell. And in part it is explainable by larger shifts in the country's social and political temper. In 1912 Progressivism was on the rise, the country generally was in an idealistic mood, and literary radicalism could feel relatively comfortable in the general ambience. In 1928, Coolidge Prosperity and Big Business dominated, the country was generally materialistic, and literary radicalism was much more at odds with the times. Hence one might expect something of a hardening of the radicals' position, especially as Russian Communism had established itself as the particular mode in which socialism in the broad sense was to operate.

Looked at another way, there was an important continuity to American literary radicalism from 1912 to 1928 so that, despite its gradual shifting and narrowing, it established itself as a viable tradition from which the Proletarian movement of the thirties would grow. In general the Left literary movement of the twenties should be regarded as an aspect of the general cultural criticism engaged in by American artists and intellectuals throughout the decade, the same criticism which drove the expatriates abroad and spawned the social satire of Sinclair Lewis and the "booboisie"-baiting of H. L. Mencken. In fact, both the artistic and political
forms of cultural criticism which grew up in the twenties had diverged from a unity that they once enjoyed in Greenwich Village cafes and flats in the teens. At that time, as I have mentioned, artistic Bohemianism, the practice of shocking the middle class, and political Leftism co-existed happily in and around the offices of the old Masses and the parties of Mabel Dodge. The spirit of artistic non-conformism and political radicalism were at that time twin aspects of the same impulse, but gradually, as political commitment hardened, it became necessary for artists and intellectuals to choose between commitment to party discipline, which the political orientation required, and commitment to individualism, which the artistic orientation required. In fact, this polarity between artistic freedom and party loyalty was to continue to plague literary radicalism even through the thirties when the two ideas were reunited in the Proletarian movement. Leftist writers and critics never could solve the problem of how a literary man could simultaneously be a good party man and retain his artistic freedom. This conflict led on the one hand to a writer subordinating his talent to partisan politics and on the other to a writer announcing his independence and leaving the movement or being booted out. A similar problem, though not in the form of party politics, had confronted Walt Whitman, the first "poet of democracy," nearly eighty years before, as he was torn between celebration of the individual and celebration of society. The philosophical tenet of the transcendental unity of the Many
and the One aided Whitman's resolution of the conflict, but in the 1930's partisan politics allowed for no such view; a writer, an intellectual--anyone--was either an individualist or a collectivist, not both. With this kind of dichotomy in the future in 1922, the takeover of The Liberator by the Workers' Party marked an important point of divergence in the old unity of radical cultural criticism. Daniel Aaron quotes Joseph Freeman as saying that the transfer of the editorial offices of The Liberator from the Village to Party headquarters on East Eleventh Street was "'a turning point of the utmost importance in the history of the radical and liberal writer in America.'" Thereafter, generally, there was the form of cultural criticism which found expression in the expatriate movement, in magazines such as The Seven Arts, The Dial, The Nation, and The New Republic, and in the voices of such men as Van Wyck Brooks and Harold Stearns; and there was the more political form of cultural criticism which found expression in the growing Proletarian movement, in magazines such as New Masses and Modern Quarterly, and in the voices of Mike Gold and V. F. Calverton. Moreover, the literary Leftists increasingly saw themselves as activists, practical men involved in the social sphere, in "Life," and, therefore, in opposition to the aesthetes, the art-for-art's sakers, the ivory tower intellectuals. As part of the politicizing process, the radicals aligned themselves with the working

6 Aaron, p. 96.
class early in the twenties and scorned the apolitical artists and intellectuals for their inability or unwillingness to break their ties to the bourgeoisie or, worse, to the leisure class, whom the Leftists considered mere "social parasites." As this split widened, and as Gold’s proletarian intentions for New Masses indicate, the Leftists sought to focus their literary attention on the expression of the American working class experience. At the same time, Gold and Freeman wanted to express their own working class backgrounds in literature and to help others from similar backgrounds and radical sensibilities find a literary voice, a voice which had not been heard in important American literature—save for Jack London—since Whitman in the 1850's.

By the time of the 1929 Crash, literary Leftism, though certainly not the dominant voice in American artistic and intellectual circles, was well-established and ready for the events that were soon to occur and ready, as Mike Gold has said, to hail the arrival of a proletarian genius. But the existence of a hard-core literary Left alone, no matter how well-established, does not account for the size and strength of the Marxist literary movement of the early Depression years. For a full explanation of the rapid growth of the movement, one must analyze its appeal to politically uncommitted writers and intellectuals in the early thirties. For many such men the Marxist answer to their problems and concerns—both personal and professional—was cogent and compelling.
Most obviously there was the factor of the 1929 Crash and ensuing Depression. Finding himself the victim of economic forces, the writer, perhaps already given to a sympathetic identification with the People in the abstract, recognized that he was in the same boat with clerks, machinists, and laborers, much as Whitman had said metaphorically in "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry." But where Whitman had seen the poet united with workers, affirmatively, in a "well-join'd scheme," the writer of the Depression years considered himself and workers united as victims of economics. And if the uncommitted writer were given to a criticism of the values and power of the bourgeoisie, which he most likely was throughout the twenties, his antagonism would only strengthen now that he found the market for his product drying up. Through the twenties the writer or intellectual did not have to concern himself much with social or economic matters; they were too pedestrian. But now they impinged on his professional life if magazines folded or cut back, if publishing houses bought fewer manuscripts, if he himself were on the street or in the breadlines. The writer or intellectual, likely to have suffered spiritual dislocation from his home during the post-War and Boom years, now found this dislocation spreading from the spiritual to the physical realm. In such circumstances his social vision was likely to sharpen, especially if aided by Marxian spectacles. The non-radical writer thus
became "declassed," the first step toward identification with the proletariat.  

Another factor which aided greatly in swinging writers to the Left was the fact that Marxism offered them a sense of commitment to something larger than themselves. Perhaps the most widely-shared feelings among Americans in the early Depression years were those of shame and guilt, as for instance Studs Terkel's *Hard Times* and James Agee's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* reveal. Writers too were subject to these feelings: shame at being without work, even through no fault of their own, and guilt if they were working, when that work was seen as self-expressive and personal (hence self-indulgent), as escapism and mere aestheticism. In addition, the sense of isolation felt by artists and intellectuals throughout the twenties had become an oppressive weight. As Malcolm Cowley's *Exile's Return* so amply demonstrates, even before the Depression set in, American writers and intellectuals were hungry for commitment, having played out their individual rebelliousness through expatriation, Dadaism, and the Religion of Art. As Cowley has expressed it elsewhere, literary people were "looking for some cure outside themselves, which they found in the idea of uniting themselves with the mass or the group, and being not a leader, but just one in the ranks of the

---

7 For an account of just such a progression Left (though without mention of personal economic hardship) by an intellectual and man of letters, see the final chapter of Edmund Wilson's *The American Jitters* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1932).
great army that was marching toward a new dawn." On a similar note, in the closing section of the 1934 edition of Exile's Return, he had argued that the revolutionary movement "can offer an end to the desperate feeling of solitude and uniqueness that has been oppressing artists for the last two centuries, the feeling that has reduced some of the best of them to silence or futility and the weaker ones to insanity or suicide. It can offer instead a sense of comradeship and participation in a historical process vastly bigger than the individual." The Proletarian movement, with its great emphasis on collectivism, comradeship, solidarity, and shared effort, was thus the perfect "cure" for the illnesses of isolation and guilt. In one of the most recent book-length studies of the Proletarian literary movement, Richard H. Pells remarks that the Depression made the ideal of "the solitary writer who managed to preserve his personal honor and integrity in the face of a corrupt society [expressed by one of the most typical spokesmen of the twenties' attitude, Ernest Hemingway] . . . sound peculiarly antique. Individual moral gestures suddenly appeared out of place when men desperately needed collective solutions to their problems. To bury oneself in one's art at a time of massive social disintegration seemed a selfish luxury which neither the

writer nor the country could afford. With the onset of the Depression, writers were anxious to prove their usefulness and the practical value of their craft, and to shun the ivory tower label. The Proletarian movement, of course, put great stress on this very point--the social utility of literature--thus answering another of the literary man's needs at the time.

With his consciousness raised on social and economic matters by virtue of his having been cast into hardship with other workers, and with his need for commitment also drawing him Leftward, if the non-radical writer or intellectual observed the apparent success of Soviet Russia in dealing with problems that capitalism was manifestly unable to solve, he was very likely compelled to accept the Marxist interpretation of the events going on around and affecting him. For many such writers, it was the only interpretation that made sense.

But the crucial factor is that it made sense in more ways than one. Not only did Marxism explain economic and social matters--about which the writer was never too sure anyway--not only did it appeal to him as a man, more significantly it offered an imaginative vision that brought into clear focus both his personal and human concerns and his intellectual concerns. It gave shape to the cultural

criticism in which he and his fellows had been engaged for a dozen years or more. It ordered chaos—and in more important areas than economics.

For one thing, Marxism envisioned a unified culture to take the place of the fragmented one of the twenties which had haunted the imaginations of such figures as Eliot and Tate. Artists and intellectuals were to have an important cultural leadership role for a change; their ideas and criticism were to be respected, honored, instead of ignored. Marxism promised the creation and application of new values to replace the decadent and corrupt ones that had both isolated the artist in the twenties and precipitated the Crash. The charges from the intellectual-artistic community that the American cultural climate was hostile to art and to anything which did not ring of materialism are familiar to everyone. But to demonstrate how easy it was for an artist or intellectual who was critical in an apolitical way of American culture in the twenties to adopt the Marxist point of view, consider the remarks of two leading cultural critics of the time, one a liberal, one a Marxist. In its January, 1927, number, *New Masses* printed the results of a questionnaire on the subject of the social involvement of the artist, a questionnaire which had been answered by fourteen artists, writers, and critics, among them Van Wyck Brooks. In responding to the questions "Do you regard our contemporary American culture as decadent[?]" and "If so, what do you think will succeed it?," Brooks replied that it
was decadent, by which he meant that "it reflects life instead of creating it, or rather creating incentives to life, new and valid channels for the life-impulse to flow into." Brooks added that America, "as opposed to certain European countries," was not "producing creative men, as distinguished from creative intelligences," and that American culture was "infantile . . . due to all sorts of elements, or lack of elements in our social system, which will have to be changed first." It was precisely this change in the social system, the prelude to the maturation of American culture, which the Marxists offered. A look at the comments of a Marxist cultural critic from the twenties will indicate the similarity in the Marxist and liberal analyses. Writing in a 1927 Modern Quarterly essay, V. F. Calverton sounds reminiscent of one of the most famous of the apolitical cultural critics of the day, Ernest Hemingway, when he says that he is part of an "Idealless Age [having] discarded, first of all, rhetoric and exclamation." Furthermore, he says,

we have scorned into silence the cry of ideals such as love, truth, justice. A stirring part of the old culture, they have become but sentimental vestiges withering upon the carapace of the new. We have become sick of preachments and abstractions, sceptical of word and gesture, [because] through idealism, men have been tricked by phrase and ruined by aspiration. Energy has been wasted upon the hopeless and futile. We, on the other hand, shall be realistic. We

11 "Are Artists People?" New Masses, 2 (January, 1927), 5.
can but deride the nation that was so conquered by Wilsonian bombast. Here was the acme of idealism! A world abused and crucified by its emptiness and deception. A world war justified on its inspiration.12

The remarks of Calverton and Brooks indicate the similarity of the Marxist and non-Marxist criticism of bourgeois American culture; in some respects, Brooks sounds like a Marxist and Calverton like a liberal. Since the Marxists shared the critical attitude of the liberals towards American culture, it was easy for them to attract liberal writers and intellectuals to the Marxist camp on the basis of this common ground. In his survey The Radical Novel in the United States, Walter Rideout makes the following point about the ease with which a non-political writer could adapt his cultural criticism to the Marxist view:

With weapons blessed in the name of Art, writers had fought in the twenties against a bourgeoisie conceived as a dominant group seeking to impose meretricious "business" values on the creative individual. . . . It was easy for them to confound their vague, abusive use of the term "bourgeois" with the more descriptive use of it made by Marxism. . . . Writers found that they could fight with weapons blessed in the name of Politics against their old enemy, now conceived as a dominant class seeking to keep down the creative masses. From this new standpoint, Flaubert, who had counseled that hatred of the bourgeoisie was the beginning of virtue, was not contradicted by Marx, but transcended by him.

Through the Marxist view of world history, individual hatred could be enlarged into class antagonism, victory by rebellion into victory by revolution. Communism answered both the writer's negative recoil from things as they were and his positive desire for things as they should be.13

In responding to these "negative" and "positive" impulses, the Leftists offered the picture of a new civilization which was to arise out of a proletarian revolution. The Leftist description of the classless society was particularly attractive to artists and intellectuals considering the nature of their criticism of bourgeois society and the fact that they had seen their non-materialistic values rejected for a dozen years. The Communist vision was of a society transformed by social revolution into one in which, among other things, what the artist had to offer would be appreciated and his sense of isolation ended. In the broadest sense, what would be achieved would be an end to the isolation of the artist which had existed since the Romantic period, a reinstitution of the artist's place as public spokesman or bard in a way that Walt Whitman had envisioned but which had not obtained since the early eighteenth century; as James B. Gilbert says in his study of the history of the Partisan Review, "a new union of art and politics" would be

created. For artists and intellectuals suffering under the peculiarly acute sense of angst and exile that the twenties fostered, such a promise was irresistible. Part of the appeal of the Marxist analysis lay in the fact that it both explained the inhospitality of bourgeois culture to art and promised the receptiveness of proletarian culture in one stroke: if the reason that artists were isolated and ignored heretofore was the dominance of the bourgeoisie, it followed from the dialectic that the proletariat would be appreciative. This logic lies behind Joseph Freeman's remark at the First American Writers' Congress that "in its final stages of decomposition, capitalism means the doom of everything fine in human thought. The working class alone, in emancipating itself, can emancipate the whole of mankind, and with it release undreamed-of forces for the conquest of knowledge, the creation of art." In his address on "The Writer in the Soviet Union" before the same Congress, Matthew Josephson elaborated on what Freeman had said. "A working class revolution," he said, "stimulates learning, reading and almost all cultural activities to a degree that few of us could have imagined beforehand and that none of the defenders of capitalism are yet willing to admit. This startling effect of


widespread interest in and widespread practice of an art," he went on to say, "indicates unmistakably the preliminary condition which in past times has always led to the flowering of a great culture." But Josephson reminded his listeners that there was work to be done before the cultural millennium was established. "Before we can raise the status of workers in the field of literature there must be a social revolution" after which, "no longer depending upon the accidental ambitions of capitalist philanthropists or the whims and appetites of entrepreneurs, literature will find a very broad basis of support in the masses, in their state, in their institutions." 

The writer's duty was clear: he must work for the "social revolution" if he wanted to help end his isolation from society and see his values reign. Sweetening the prospect of social engagement for the artist were comments like Mike Gold's in his New Masses column. "The Revolution," he said, "is not a barbaric uprising of medieval peasants, but a social revolution. Its aim is not only to overthrow a stupid and bloody ruling class, but to create a new world." As evidence of the latter, Gold said, the revolutionary movement "has already set up tremendous new syntheses in all the arts and sciences; and in the next fifty years, out of our turmoil and battling, a great beneficent culture of which we have only the first sketches now will arise and

reign with unimaginable splendor over the human mind." And in similarly lofty language Harbor Allen answered the question in New Masses' "Are Artists People?" questionnaire that asked if there were "any hope of a new world culture through the rise of the workers to power [and] if so, what will that culture be like?" by saying, "Nothing is surer than that the social revolution will be the torch for a new flame of art, hopeful where it is now frustrated, lusty where it is now anemic, bold and gleeful where now it is bound and surly." So that all these promises would not be dismissed as just so much pie in the sky, the Marxists could further offer the example of writers and artists in the Soviet Union. They did not suffer from "negative recoil from things as they are" because their values and those of the dominant class—the revolutionary proletariat—were harmonious. Matthew Josephson reported to the 1935 American Writers' Congress that "in Russia . . . the writer feels no clash between his own idealism and that of the people who carry on the work of socialist construction. He is at one with them; his mood is an affirmative and optimistic one rather than critical or destructive." 

17 Mike Gold, "Notes of the Month," New Masses, 6 (August, 1930), 4-5.
18 "Are Artists People?," New Masses, 2 (January, 1927), 9.
Thus on the question of the artist's relationship to and proper role in society the Marxists had powerful arguments to attract the typically alienated writer or intellectual at the time of the Depression. Through the Marxist vision such a person could, as Gilbert puts it, "claim the support of history. ... it was [now] possible ... that with a profound social transformation the intellectual would take his true place in society. In the meantime, he could ally himself with the most progressive force, the potential source of revolution, the proletariat."20

Still another area of interest on the part of writers and intellectuals to which the Marxists could and did appeal concerned the establishment of a native American literature. This had been a concern of American men of letters continuously since Emerson took it up as an issue in the 1830's. And the debate over literary independence and nationalism was still going strong in the twenties. Here again the literary Marxists spoke the language of many writers and intellectuals interested in the question. Drawing heavily on the images of Emerson, Thoreau, and especially Whitman, they argued that the Proletarian point of view alone could foster the development of a true native American literature. Had not Whitman embraced the masses and seen in them the essence of America? Was he not the prototypical poet of democracy, and because of that the most American of writers?

20 Gilbert, Writers and Partisans, pp. 92-93.
Mike Gold certainly thought so. In his seminal 1921 Liberator essay "Towards Proletarian Art," he had hailed Whitman as the "heroic spiritual grandfather of our generation in America,"21 who teaches that "a mighty national art cannot arise save out of the soul of the masses"(24). The essay goes on, in a highly Whitmanesque manner, to establish a theme which Gold and other Leftist critics were to sound often in the years ahead: that Whitman was, in effect, a Proletarian writer ahead of his time, and that writers who similarly dedicated themselves to expressing the masses placed themselves in the most honored tradition in American literature. Gold conceded that Whitman made "one mistake," thinking that "political democracy . . . could express in completion all the aspirations of proletarian man," but on the other hand, and far more significantly, he anticipated the proletarian culture in Democratic Vistas, and "in his poetry [he] had intuitively arrived at the proletarian art" (22-23). As a Proletarian poet should, Whitman dwelt among the masses, and from them he drew his strength. From the obscure lives of the masses he absorbed those deep affirmations of the instinct that are his glory. Walt has been called a prophet of individualism, but that is the usual blunder of literature. Walt knew the masses too well to believe that any individual could rise in intrinsic value above them. His individuals were those great, simple

21 Mike Gold, "Towards Proletarian Art," Liberator, 4 (February, 1921), 22. The remaining citations of Gold in the paragraph are from this article.
farmers and mechanics and sailors and ditch-diggers who are to be found everywhere among the masses—those powerful natural persons whose heroism needs no drug of fame or applause to enable them to continue; those humble, mighty parts of the mass, whose self-sufficiency comes from their sense of solidarity, not from any sense of solitariness." (22)

Furthermore, Gold said, if writers and intellectuals were truly interested in establishing a true national literature, they must turn away from the elitism of literary debates and get in close touch with the masses, because "it is not in [the] hot-house air [of literary magazines] that the lusty great tree [of American literature] will grow. Its roots must be in the fields, factories and workshops of America--in the American life"(24). In the emphasis he put on the masses, in his frequent panegyrics to Whitman, and in the very language and style of many of his essays, Gold evoked Whitman's image, with the suggestion that expressing the proletariat was the way for a writer to become a new Whitman, the bard of socialism instead of democracy, and this was certainly an attractive idea to dangle before writers anxious for the creation of a true American literature.

V. F. Calverton also used figures from the American literary tradition to urge writers and intellectuals Left. In a Modern Quarterly article entitled "Leftward, Ho!" Calverton argued that what the American intellectual needed was "a renewed faith in the masses . . . something of that faith in the potentialities of the proletariat which Emerson and Whitman possessed in the masses of the nineteenth
Calverton differed from Gold on the question of Whitman's individualism, saying that Whitman's and Emerson's belief in the common man "was a belief in him as a petty bourgeois individualist [whereas] our belief must be in him as a proletarian collectivist," but he excused that error as "fitting and persuasive enough" for the mid-nineteenth century and asserted that only in the faith in the masses that Emerson and Whitman displayed lay "the ultimate liberation of American literature--and American life"(32). In addition to this argument, Calverton took pains in his article to show that "the increasing radicalization of the American intellectual"(26) was "a mainstream affair"(27) in American literary history and not "a superficial phenomenon"(26). To do so he headnoted the article with quotes from Thoreau, Thaddeus Stevens, J. R. Lowell, Mark Twain, and Jack London to show that "there have been many literary intellectuals in America who have fought on the side of the radicals instead of the reactionaries" and that "in fact American intellectuals have built up a whole tradition of revolt"(26). If the prospect of joining this august company was not enough for the potential convert to Leftism, Calverton offered a bandwagon piled high with contemporary literary intellectuals who had "swung left": Theodore Dreiser, Edmund Wilson, Edwin Seaver, Granville Hicks, Newton Arvin, Clifton Fadiman, Malcolm Cowley, Ernest Sutherland Bates, Lionel Trilling,

22 V. F. Calverton, "Leftward, Ho!" Modern Quarterly, 6 (Summer, 1932), 32. The remaining citations of Calverton in the paragraph are from this article.
Felix Morrow. All were "men who belong in the main tradition of our literature." They were also "clearcut products of the American soil, men who were born in this country, educated in it, indigenous outgrowths of its cultural pattern [whose] revolutionary insight has been derived from native sources and not foreign ones"(27). Thus the uncommitted writer or intellectual was persuaded to believe that adoption of the revolutionary viewpoint and identification with the proletariat were in the highest traditions of American letters, lest he should fear that literary Leftism was a foreign movement.

Indeed there were important "native sources" for the "revolutionary insight" of the Leftist writers. It may have been ideological zeal which prompted Leftists like Gold and Calverton to see such figures as Emerson and Whitman as "spiritual grandfathers" of the Proletarian literary movement, but the literary Left did have a valid basis for tracing their heritage to the thought and work of Emerson and Whitman. In seeking literary expression for the young American nation, Emerson and Whitman were just two of many nineteenth-century writers who faced a radically new situation with respect to literature's relation to society. The newness of the American experience and the unique character of American democracy called for a literature which could express the two often conflicting impulses which moved the young nation: the individual and the mass. For America was at once new with respect to both; as never before in history,
here was a country dedicated to the sacredness of the individual, but at the same time holding each individual equal with his fellows in the democratic mass. The needs of the individual and the mass were somehow to be maintained in equilibrium, and the resulting tension was reflected in the work of Emerson and Whitman. In "The American Scholar," the essay widely recognized as the first important statement in the American literary renaissance of the nineteenth century, Emerson displayed his divided thinking with respect to the individual versus the mass. The essay moves to a conclusion in which Emerson urges the would-be scholar to "plant himself indomitably upon his instincts, and there abide," in short, to rely on himself as an individual.23 But for Emerson this kind of individualism did not oppose the interests of the mass. To the contrary, intellectual self-reliance insured that ultimately the interests of the mass would be expressed as well, because the scholar would find that "in going down into the secrets of his own mind, he has descended into the secrets of all minds"(103). Moreover, Emerson had begun his talk with a recounting of the fable that said that the ancient gods divided the collective man into individual men, "just as the hand was divided into fingers, the better to answer its end"(82). He reminded his audience "that there is One Man... and that you must take

the whole society to find the whole man"(82), and he explained that "the fable implies that the individual to possess himself, must sometimes return from his own labor to embrace all the other laborers"(83). Thus Emerson attempted to resolve the inherent conflict between the desires of the individual and the needs of the mass. Similarly, Whitman's "leaves of grass" figure was intended to express the individual and the collective simultaneously, and like Emerson, Whitman believed that as he sang himself he also sang everyone. If Emerson and Whitman felt the tension between the individual and the mass created by the new American situation and were able to maintain an equilibrium between the two in their work, the course of subsequent American development through the 1920's revealed that what was balanced in theory had come out of balance in practice. The expansion of industrial capitalism in the late nineteenth century was individualism run rampant, at the expense of the mass. Taken to its logical conclusion, this individualism resulted in social and cultural anarchy and chaos, reflected in the fragmentation of the twenties. Following this line of thinking, the Leftists saw the American culture of the twenties as the degeneration of individualism into solipsistic madness, a degeneration reflected in the "personal" literature which the Leftists so roundly deplored. As the non-Leftist critic Yvor Winters has observed in an interesting corroboration of what the Leftists were saying,
Emersonian self-reliance pursued to its inevitable conclusion is insanity. As I have noted above, other non-radical critics of the American culture of the twenties had similarly decried the self-centeredness, materialism, and heedless individualism which characterized American life during the Boom years, as did the Marxists. But what the Marxists did which the non-Leftist cultural critics did not do--and which added enormously to the appeal of Leftism--was to go back to Emerson and Whitman and emphasize the other side of the duality of American democracy, the mass. By this method they not only exposed the evils of capitalism as a system designed to promote the interests of the individual (bourgeoisie) at the expense of the mass (proletariat), but they remained within the highest traditions of American letters. Since Emerson and Whitman did recognize the essential importance of the mass to the American experience, the Leftists had reasonable grounds on which to stake their claim that singing the mass was at once the antidote to the sickness of American culture under capitalism and the expression of the uniquely American spirit.

The literary histories produced by the Left in the early thirties argued along these lines, attempting to show that the usable past in American letters was that part which anticipated the Proletarian movement. In one such

book V. F. Calverton argued that the liberation of American literature, which implied its natural and free expression of what was essentially American, lay in Proletarianism, and in the book which first established his reputation with the Orthodox Left, The Newer Spirit (1925), Calverton applied the Marxist method to the Anglo-American literary tradition and showed that literary concerns were related to larger socio-economic factors: literature had changed as society had changed from feudal-aristocratic to bourgeois and now to proletarian. This method made it clear that the direction of literary history, like that of social history, was toward proletarianism, and the writer who wanted to be in step, who wanted to be in contact with the vital and dynamic in human affairs must necessarily express the hopes and destiny of the proletariat. Again, Whitman was a model, the first major American writer to express the newer spirit by elevating the proletarian to the heroic stature accorded the general or the statesman in the literature of earlier epochs and by revealing him as "a being capable of the deepest thoughts and feelings and of the profoundest tragedy." In The Great Tradition (1933) Granville Hicks argued that the history of American literature since the Civil War revealed many branches that were barren after having been plucked by one or two writers,


but only one that had borne fruit for successive generations of writers. This was the attempt to deal with the fundamental reality in American life since the Civil War: a developing industrial capitalism and its effects. Hicks too paid homage to Whitman as the first American writer to see the implications of Emerson's belief in the common man "for an industrial age," but for Hicks it was really William Dean Howells who first seized hold of the reality of American life in a meaningful literary way. Howells "made a beginning, . . . his novels came to embrace more and more of American life, [and] . . . he succeeded, as Hawthorne and Melville had not done, as James and Mark Twain did not do, in founding a school"(302). The men who followed Howells' example--Crane, Fuller, Garland, Norris--"brought literature closer to the main stream of American life," and this progress continued through the work of the muckrakers and such twentieth century writers as Dreiser, Lewis, and Anderson (302). This tradition approached its consummation, said Hicks, in the radical writers of the Proletarian movement, whose work Hicks called "the most vigorous that the [present] era is producing or can produce [because] it stands in the most vital relationship to the best in the American literature of the past"(301). Hicks made it plain that if the writer is interested in what is truest and best in American letters, "if he is accurately and intelligently to portray American life, [and] if he is

to express whatever is vital and hopeful in the American spirit, [he] must ally himself with the working class"(303). Hicks went on to present the situation that lay before the writer in 1933 in terms of a series of choices, and these choices indicate much about the Leftist writers' belief that fulfillment of the greatest traditions in American literature depended upon the writer's alliance with the working class. If the writer "ignores the class struggle," Hicks said,

he surrenders all hope of arriving at a clear interpretation, out of which a significant formal pattern may be devised, and he commits himself to evasion after evasion. If he assumes the role of impartiality, he merely deceives and confuses himself, since impartiality is impossible. If he accepts the existing order for what it is and nevertheless accepts it because he profits by it, he avoids the weakness of evasion, but he cuts himself off from a large part of the human race, and callousness is substituted for the sympathy which is so important an attribute. If however, the writer allies himself with the proletariat, there is no need of evasion or self-deception. He may be tempted to exaggerate the faults of capitalists or the virtues of workers, but if he is wise he will find in facts his all-sufficient bulwark. Moreover, as this way of looking at life becomes an integral part of his imaginative equipment, he can not only perceive the operation of underlying forces; he can also rejoice in their play because of his confidence in what they will eventually accomplish.(304-05)

Given these choices, Hicks said, the issue for the writer was clear: "on the one hand lies the repudiation of the best in the American literary past, on the other the fulfillment of
all that was dreamed of and worked for in the past and the beginning of struggle for more than the past could ever have hoped" (306).

I have quoted Hicks' remarks at length here to show something of the arguments used by the literary Left to appeal to the uncommitted artist's interest in the establishment of a genuine American literature, but these remarks also suggest the final, and perhaps most persuasive, appeal of the Proletarian literary movement. It was argued that going Left would improve the writer's craft, make him a better writer. There were several reasons for this. One, rather complicated, had to do with the decadence of bourgeois literature and the rewards of abandoning the sinking ship of bourgeois culture for the safety of the rising proletarian culture. Closely related to what Hicks had to say about the fruitful and barren possibilities in the American literary tradition and to the major thesis of twenties cultural criticism, this argument held that bourgeois literature led to a spiritual deadend because of its concern with personal feelings, the exploration of a character's mind, interior reality, and so forth. The Marxists argued that since the central reality of modern life was the class struggle, writers who failed to deal with aspects of that struggle in their work were necessarily involved in trivia or a form of literary masturbation. Just as the world stood at the interface of two antithetical social orders, it was argued, so it stood with respect to literature: bourgeois literature, while
once meaningful and useful, had run its course and, like the capitalism that produced it, had become decadent by the end of the third decade of the twentieth century. According to the Marxian dialectic, proletarian literature would soon replace bourgeois literature, and if the writer recognized this he could insure his own professional progress by allying himself with the working class. Malcolm Cowley made reference to this idea in his address--entitled "What the Revolutionary Movement Can Do for a Writer"--before the First American Writers' Congress, when he said that the "revolutionary movement allies the interests of writers with those of a class that is rising, instead of with the interests of a confused and futile and dying class." Such an alliance meant, of course, personal engagement for the writer in the class struggle; a detached sympathy was impossible. A typical expression of this position is found in Edwin Seaver's "Literature at the Crossroads" in the April, 1932, number of New Masses, in which Seaver offered the familiar criticisms that "much of the literary output of American writers is lacking in maturity, in purpose, in direction," that it "makes no more impression on our national life than snow in April," and that "much of our creative literature is either the literature of empty violence or lyric escape." He attributed these faults to "a real split in the consciousness of the American writer, a split between what he conceives

to be his function as a social being and his function as a writer," and he said that this was a split which the writer "will have to bridge if he is to go ahead at all, for the alternative is decay and death." Seaver's remarks were published after the Proletarian movement had made its early mass appeals to writers and intellectuals and after many American writers had developed an activism as "social beings," in Seaver's phrase. He was complaining of the split that remained between the artist-as-person and the artist-as-artist. A decade earlier, however, and all through the twenties, when the literary Left was still engaged in trying to see to it that the artist was a social being as well as a creative one, Mike Gold offered arguments similar to Seaver's on the question of how the engagement of the writer in the social sphere could benefit him in the creative. In 1921 he had said that the "elder artists" of that time had all been "sick" because they had had "no roots in the people. The art ideals of the capitalistic world isolated each artist as in a solitary cell, there to brood and suffer silently and go mad." In 1926, in the inaugural edition of New Masses, he had anticipated what Granville Hicks was to say in The Great Tradition: "America today offers the honest young writer only one choice--Revolt!" The reasons

29 Edwin Seaver, "Literature at the Crossroads," New Masses, 7 (April, 1932), 12.

Gold presented which had forced this choice went right to the heart of the twenties artists' dissatisfaction with American society:

No human and sensitive artist can assent to this vast Roman orgy of commercialism, this wholesale prostitution of the mind, this vast empire of cheapness and shallowness and hypocrisy that forms the current America. No creative mind can be permanently happy worshipping the Dollar Bill, or taking 'spiritual' commands from Mr. J. P. Morgan, who dictates our American environment. Revolt is the organ-bass that softly or harshly throbs through the young literature of America today. We are not satisfied. We are not part of the American empire. We repudiate it in the name of art. We shall revolt.

But, Gold went on to ask, "shall we revolt blindly . . . or with full, bold, hard consciousness?" John Dos Passos (to whose essay on "The New Masses I'd Like" Gold was responding) and others said the revolt should be blind, cultivating, according to Gold, "the isolated sensation." But in urging such a direction for literature, Gold said, "they reject all generalizations [and thus] . . . hug chaos to their bosoms, and all the heroes of their fiction wind up in chaos and failure."31 Thus the only meaningful and fulfilling path for the writer to take was the one that led Left. In 1929, Gold was still urging the writer Left for his own creative good, and in an essay published in January of that year he tinged the whole discussion with an unconscious Biblical

31 All quotes in this passage are from Gold, "Let It Be Really New," New Masses, 1 (June, 1926), 20.
allusion, suggesting that something akin to spiritual salvation lay in going Left. "The best and newest thing a young writer can do now in America," he said, "if he has the vigor and the guts, is to go leftward. If he gets tangled up in the other thing [fashionable literature] he will make some money, maybe, but he will lose everything else. Neither the *Saturday Evening Post* nor the *Nation* can any longer nourish the free heroic soul."  

If Gold thought that embracing Marxism could save a writer's soul, Malcolm Cowley offered a somewhat more down-to-earth argument for writers to go Left. In his address to the First American Writers' Congress, Cowley said that "the revolutionary movement can and will do more for writers than writers can do for the revolutionary movement," and he went on to cite five specific benefits that it offered. One of these I have mentioned above as the contention that it was beneficial for the writer to be allied with the interests of a rising rather than a dying class. Among the remaining four, first there was the practical consideration

---

32 Mike Gold, "Go Left, Young Writers!" *New Masses*, 4 (January, 1929), 3. That Gold had a religious zeal for the Proletarian movement is evident almost everywhere in his writing, but perhaps most explicitly in "Towards Proletarian Art," wherein he says, "the Social Revolution ... is the religion of the masses, articulate at last, ... that religion that says that Life is one, that Men are one, ... so the Revolution, in its secular manifestations of strike, boycott, mass-meeting, imprisonment, sacrifice, agitation, martyrdom, organization, is thereby worthy of the religious devotion of the artist" (22).

33 see above, note 27.
of audience; the revolutionary movement, Cowley said, offered writers "the most eager and alive and responsive audience that now exists": the class-conscious proletariat, hungry for literature which would simultaneously express and confirm their inevitable triumph in the class struggle. Next, Cowley said that the revolutionary movement gave writers a "whole new range of subject matter," which naturally would improve their product. On this point Cowley struck the familiar note of the inadequacy of personal literature. During the fifty years ending with 1930, he said, "there was an increasing tendency for serious novelists and dramatists to occupy themselves with a single theme: the conflict between the individual and society, between the Artist and the World." Among the characteristics of literature of this type is that

the hero is presented as a great figure

typical of all mankind--'a legend of man's

hunger in his youth'--whereas in reality

he is typical of nothing except the over-
educated and under-adjusted young man of

the lower middle classes, who finds that

the dream-world of books is to be preferred
to the drab world he actually encounters.

Another characteristic is that although

these novels portray a conflict between

the individual and society, all the empha-
sis, all the loving sympathy, is placed

on the individual. Society, the outer

world, becomes progressively dimmer and

more puzzling in the artist's eyes. There

is an attempt to escape from it into an

inner world, into the subconscious, until

finally these artist-and-the-world novels

are transformed into interior monologues.34

34 All quotes in this passage are from Cowley, "What the Revolutionary Movement Can Do for a Writer," in American Writers' Congress, ed. Henry Hart, pp. 60-62.
While the interior monologue was initially hailed as a technique for "enriching the texture of fiction," Cowley said, it had turned out to be nothing of the sort because "the inner world of one middle class novelist was very much like the inner world of another middle class novelist"(62). In contrast to all this, Cowley said, the revolutionary movement had had the "liberating effect . . . to carry the interests of novelists outside themselves, into the violent contrasts and struggles of the real world"(62).

Third, Cowley said,

the revolutionary movement gives the artist a perspective on himself--an idea that his own experiences are not something accidental and unique, but are part of a vast pattern. The revolutionary movement teaches him that art is not an individual but a social product--that it arises from experience in society, and that, if these experiences cease and if the artist no longer participates in the life about him, the whole source of his inspiration runs dry, evaporates like a shallow pool after the rain.35

Finally, "the principal gift" of the revolutionary movement to the writer was the

sense of human life, not as a medley of accidents, but as a connected and continuing process. It ties things together, allowing novelists to see the connection between things that are happening to-day in our own neighborhoods, at the gates of factories, in backyards and street-corners, with the German counter-revolution, with

35 ibid., p. 62.
the fight for collectivization in Russia, with the civil war now being waged in the interior of China; and it connects all these events with the struggles of the past. It gives the values, the unified interpretation, without which one can write neither good history nor good tragedy.36

In a word, the revolutionary movement could give a writer the necessary imaginative vision with which to shape experience and make order of the apparent chaos of the modern world. In its very reductivism, Marxism was like a parabolic lens that brought widely scattered phenomena of experience into focus, and thus it was a potentially valuable tool for the writer. Given the particular combination of circumstances and current of ideas that the American writer faced in the years immediately following the 1929 Crash, it must have seemed particularly so.

In summary, it can be said that the Proletarian movement appealed to writers and intellectuals in several important areas of concern. It gave direction to the anger and frustration they felt in their personal lives; it answered their need for commitment to something larger than themselves after a decade or more of individualistic excesses; it shared their criticism of the dominant American culture of the twenties, and it offered a handy explanation of that which they criticized; it spoke to their concern for renewed vitality in the American literary tradition; and finally it offered several

36 ibid., p. 64.
desirable means to the improvement of their product—literature itself. James Gilbert has expressed much of this in his phrase that the Proletarian movement offered "renaissance and revolution" and the chance for a young writer to emerge as "a new Jack London or a Walt Whitman." The time was right in the early thirties for the creation of a new and human-centered American culture, and the Leftists offered the writer an important role in assisting the formation of such a culture. Coming when it did—at a time when American writers and intellectuals were more concerned than ever before with problems of their isolation from American life—the Proletarian literary movement was enormously attractive. For once it appeared that writers and their work could really make a difference.

37 James B. Gilbert, Writers and Partisans, pp. 93-94.
Chapter II
The Theory of the Proletarian Novel

The first principle of the theory of the Proletarian novel was the usefulness of literary art. As the comments of Mike Gold and Malcolm Cowley show, the Left literary movement saw itself as an antidote to the "sickness" prevalent in capitalist literature. Symptoms of this sickness were the artist's isolation from his fellow men and his emphasis on art as an aesthetic object rather than a useful one. A restoration to health required an end to the art versus life duality that had developed from nineteenth-century Romanticism. The Leftists wanted to move the man of letters and literature back into the mainstream of society's life, and accordingly their theory of literature emphasized qualities such as its affective power, its communicativeness, its interpretive ability—in short, all those qualities that made literature an instrument for social cohesion. If literature were to perform a positive role in first shaping and then maintaining the proletarian culture, then the writer must speak as a bard and not be an aesthete. But he could do so only by regarding himself as a person first and as a writer second. The Leftist ideal
saw the writer in a reciprocal relationship with the proletariat: he supplied what they wanted by expressing, not his own state of mind or feelings, but the situation, the hopes, the future of the masses; they supplied what he needed in the form of inspiration, audience, and gratitude. In this fashion both writer and reader were to be fulfilled.

To draw an analogy, the writer was seen as a socio-political doctor. In the pre-revolutionary situation, his first function was to diagnose the disease. The radicals saw that non-Marxist writers such as Sinclair Lewis and Theodore Dreiser had made a kind of diagnosis in the twenties. But it was incomplete because it was not aided by Marxian analysis, which alone could get to the root of the capitalist malaise. For such writers as Lewis and Dreiser, a workable prognosis was unavailable; as V. F. Calverton put it, "interpretation, . . . one of the most significant functions of art, is beyond them. Having no chart of values, interpretation is impossible."¹ The anti-bourgeois writers of the twenties had had their old middle-class values stripped away, but unless they had come to Marxism, they had no systematic interpretive vision to compensate for what they had lost. Marxism provided them with a prognostic instrument, so the writer-as-doctor, having been to the Marxist medical college, could correctly analyze life in terms of the class struggle. He was to "heal" by raising the class-consciousness

¹ V. F. Calverton, "Leftward, Ho!" Modern Quarterly, 6 (Summer, 1932), 31.
of the proletariat by the special medicine of literature. And he was to assure the continued health of the masses by providing a vision of their revolutionary future. To carry the analogy a bit further, we may say that in the writer/doctor's kit were such remedies as objectivism, realism, and revolutionary optimism. Though Mike Gold's images are not medical, his "Towards Proletarian Art" conveys this general sense of the Proletarian writer's role. Envisioning the "great new art" that will arise out of the "great new life" in Russia, Gold wrote in 1921 that "it will be an art that will sustain man, and give him equanimity, and not crucify him on his problems as did the old. The new artists will feel the mass-sufficiency, and suffer no longer that morbid sense of inferiority before the universe that was the work of the solitaries."  

Similarly, V. F. Calverton said that the writer reintegrated with society would be held in the same esteem as "the discoverer of a new anesthetic, or the inventor of a new logic. He will be neither a vagrant wretch nor a deified magician" as he had been previously in history.

The emphasis on the utility of literature is what sets the Marxists off most distinctly from the main body of early twentieth-century American literary theory. However, one

---


finds no extended theoretical discussions arguing the utility of literature in the published Leftist criticism. The utility of literature was generally assumed by Leftist critics, so that one finds occasional comments bringing this underlying assumption to the surface. Granville Hicks, for instance, remarked that "any discussion of the value of literature must begin with the assumption that literature is to be judged in terms of its effects on its readers," and V. F. Calverton said that "the aim of art should be to serve man as a thing of action and not man serve art as a thing of escape." One also finds other critical comments which follow from an assumption of the utility of literature. A modernist manifesto published by Eugene Jolas and others in transition in 1929 proposed a "revolution in the English language" and asserted that "pure poetry is a lyrical absolute that seeks an a priori reality within ourselves alone" and that "the writer expresses. He does not communicate." V. F. Calverton wrote an angry response to this manifesto, declaring that the "revolution-in-the wordists" ignored the fundamental reality that man is a social creature and language a social tool, and charging that their program moved "in the wrong direction, . . . tending ever more and more to isolate the individual from society."

4 The quotation from Hicks is from "The Crisis in American Criticism," New Masses, 8 (February, 1933), 4; the quotation from Calverton is from "Art and Social Change: the Radical Approach," Modern Quarterly, 6 (Winter, 1931), 27.

"When one can use words in any way at all in order to express oneself regardless of whether other selves can respond to this form of expression," Calverton said, "one is exalting the individual in a sense that is ridiculous. . . . To express [an individual's difference from others] in a form that expresses the individual but does not communicate . . . is to fail in the function of art."^6

Statements about art as self-expression, the dominant view of modernist writers for whom the reader—or at least the non-erudite reader—could be damned, were particularly galling to the literary Left, as perhaps Calverton's answer to the "revolution-in-the-wordists" best shows. Mike Gold went so far as to say "every poem, every novel and drama, must have a social theme, or it is merely confectionery."^7 If literature was to express, it was not to express the individual writer but the historical situation. Calverton had used the term in an earlier article when he said "we must encourage and produce an art that will express our age at the same time that it aids it." And in the same article he spoke of art's "power to move" and called it "essentially a cathartic, an expansion of experience, an incentive to activity."^8 In still another article Calverton indicated

---


^7 Mike Gold, "Notes of the Month, New Masses, 6 (September, 1930), 5.

^8 V. F. Calverton, "For a New Critical Manifesto," p. 15.
the primacy that the literary Left placed on material over method. He granted that fine execution was necessary for a work of art to attain high status, but he added that it is only when that execution is allied with materials which have meaning to other people and places that it has survival value. Obviously, thus, it is not the aesthetic values which are permanent, but it is those materials in aesthetic objects which other people can read themselves into which provide the illusion of permanence. 9

For the most part, and especially in the twenties and early Depression years, the Proletarian theorists saw form and content dualistically. The Partisan Review critics William Phillips and Philip Rahv and the writer James T. Farrell tried in the middle thirties to speak for technique as of equal importance with political content, but the majority of earlier voices stressed content over form. Leftist critics felt it was primarily the content of literature which was affective, and they sought to take a clear stand in opposition to the modernist writers whose sole concern, they thought, was form. Hence Calverton's antagonistic reaction to the transition manifesto. Mike Gold shunned what he called verbal acrobatics as "only another form of bourgeois idleness," 10 and in a review of The New American Caravan, an anthology of "avant-garde" American writing of

10 Mike Gold, "Notes of the Month," (September, 1930), p. 5.
1929, he complained that

if a clam were literary it might write this way. This is not the anthology of any kind of revolt. It is just a mournful yipping in the desert. Nothing challenging, clear cut. A kind of insipid mysticizing over obscure and petty sorrows. Lots of splendid words, phrases, sentences. But no point. This is not America or life. It smells to me like the old, familiar, academic, literary introversion.

Gold called it "expert writing" in terms of technique, but for him "new forms without a new content" seemed "as worthless . . . as walnut shells whose meat the little bugs have gnawed away."\(^1\)

Until the middle thirties, the Leftists were trying, in part, to establish their theory of literature against the dominant aestheticism of the post-war and twenties era.\(^2\)

The opposition of form and content was seen as parallel to

\(^1\) Mike Gold, "A Letter from a Clam-Digger," *New Masses*, 5 (November, 1929), 11.

\(^2\) As I have mentioned in Chapter One (pp. 15-18), dissatisfaction with the dominant culture of pre-World War I America--and Britain too, for that matter--followed two channels: a retreat into art, often accompanied in Americans by a retreat across the Atlantic to Paris, or an adoption of radical politics. Throughout the twenties it was the "artistic" camp--the followers of Pound and Eliot, of Joyce and Stein, writers like Hemingway and e. e. cummings--who enjoyed hegemony in intellectual and literary circles. The radicals struggled to differentiate themselves from the "aesthetes" and at the same time show that they too had something new to offer against the "old" literary values. Mike Gold, for instance, in a 1926 *New Masses* article urging that literary revolt take a social direction as well, intensified Pound's famous phrase. Gold's cry was "Let It Be Really New" (emphasis mine).
the opposition of "art" and "life." The radicals set up this opposition and came down on the side of "life" against mere "art" (the denigrating adjective was always implicit, if not spoken). Malcolm Cowley's discussion of the respective concerns of the bourgeois and proletarian novelists in his address to the First American Writers' Congress indicates the long-running Leftist interest in establishing this art versus life opposition. To cite another example of the same tendency, V. F. Calverton took pains in The Liberation of American Literature to point out that "proletarian writers are not to be confused with literary rebels." The latter "believe in revolt in literature," Calverton said; the former in "revolt in life. The literary rebels, for example, who became the advocates of free verse as opposed to conventional verse must not be associated with proletarian writers who are opposed to the society in which we live and aim to devote their literature to its transformation. Indeed the art versus life polarity was at the center of Proletarian literary theory. In dialectical fashion, the Marxists sought a new synthesis that would bring art out of the ivory tower and back into close connection with life. Their method, in the context of the American literary tradition, was to seek a return to the bardic aspect of the work of Emerson and Whitman. The writer was to turn outward to

13 see above, Chapter I, p. 47.
the larger community, to life, and there find the materials for his art. Such an orientation would certainly de-emphasize purely artistic concerns. However, the fact that the community to which the artist was to turn was the class-conscious proletariat instead of just, say, "the people" added two other important factors to the matter. The proletarian audience was especially unsophisticated about modern specialized literary techniques, for one thing. For another, the writer was to turn outward to the masses for a rather specific political purpose: to effect the class-consciousness of the proletariat as a means of hastening the revolution. For these reasons it was especially urgent that the writer concern himself with life and concentrate on content, rather than tie himself up in artistic and formal matters.

The involvement in life meant an end to the division between the literary artist and the artist as man. Malcolm Cowley wrote in the epilogue to the 1934 edition of Exile's Return that artists will take part in the class struggle "because they are men before they are writers or painters, and because their human interests are involved, and because they can't stay out of the battle without deliberately blinding and benumbing themselves."15 The writer was expected to follow the example of Whitman and live among the workers. In Mike Gold's formulation, typical of radical thinking on the point, the proletarian masses were Life with a capital L,

and as such the true source of worthwhile art. When he urged young writers to go Left, Gold said he meant "the real thing; a knowledge of working class life in America gained from first-hand contacts, and a hard precise philosophy . . . based on economics, not verbalisms."

In his visionary 1921 article "Towards Proletarian Art" Gold had rhapsodized on the topic of the proletariat and Life. He contrasted the "sick" bourgeois artists in their isolation and solitude with the robust proletarian artists who, he predicted, "will face [Life] from among the people. We must lose ourselves again in their sanity," he said. "We must learn through solidarity with the people what Life is," and he offered a paean to the masses and their life-giving power for the artist. The language is more generally socialistic than pointedly Marxian, owing to the early date of the article's composition, but the ideal of the proletariat established in Gold's essay was to guide Leftist critics through the rise of the radical literary movement.

Masses are never pessimistic. Masses are never sterile. Masses are never far from the earth. Masses are never far from heaven. Masses go on--they are the eternal truth. Masses are simple, strong and sure. They are never lost; they have always a goal in each age.

The masses are still primitive and clean, and artists must turn to them for strength again. The primitive sweetness, the primitive calm, the primitive ability to create simply and without fever or ambition, the primitive satisfaction and

16 Gold, "Go Left, Young Writers!" New Masses, 4 (January, 1929), 3.
self-sufficiency—they must be found again.

The masses know what Life is, and they live on in gusto and joy. The lot of man seems good to them despite everything: they work, they bear children, they sing and play. But intellectuals have become bored with the primitive monotony of Life—with the deep truths and instincts.

Gold here distinguishes "intellectuals" rather than aesthetes as those who are out of touch with life, but it is of little matter. The point is the opposition between healthy artists, those actively involved with the masses, and sick ones, those intellectuals or aesthetes who climbed off into their ivory towers and concerned themselves only with abstractions.

The emphasis on content, specifically political content, and the concern with the usefulness of literature raised the issue of propaganda for the radical critics. They argued that there was nothing shameful about art's being propagandistic and that all art was in fact promotion for some cultural or political position. At the same time the attention that Marxist critics paid to the question throughout the late twenties and early thirties creates the impression that no matter how Marxism accounted for the presence of propaganda in literature, the Leftists felt themselves on the defensive if the charge of propaganda were raised. The word's negative connotations were difficult to excise. Various responses to the issue of

literature as propaganda were made by critics in the Leftist orbit. A refugee from the liberal camp, Edmund Wilson, wrote in the *New Republic* that objections to propagandistic art were in reality objections to the ideology being propagated, not to literature embodying a "point of view." As support for his assertion he pointed out that no one objects to the fact that the work of Horace or Virgil propagandized for the political ideas of the Roman Empire, or that the work of Giotto or Fra Angelico was propaganda for Catholicism. On a similar note, Joseph Freeman tried to answer the objection of bourgeois critics to literature with a political message in the introduction to the anthology *Proletarian Literature in the United States*. Such critics, Freeman said, insist that literature should deal with "experience," but the fact is that they mean only bourgeois experience. "In an era of bitter class war such as ours," Freeman said, "party programs, collective actions, class purposes, when they are enacted in life, themselves become experiences--experiences so far-reaching, so all-inclusive that, as experiences, they transcend flirtations and autumn winds and stars and nightingales and getting drunk in Paris cafes."  

Another response to the propaganda question is illustrated

18 Edmund Wilson, "Art, the Proletariat and Marx," *New Republic*, 23 August 1933, p. 45.

by Newton Arvin in an article in *Modern Quarterly*. Arvin cited the words of Moliere, Racine, Spenser, Whitman, and Tolstoy to show that important writers in various times and places have had in mind a conscious affective purpose for their work. Like Wilson and Freeman, Arvin argued that it is not the service of literature to ends beyond itself to which bourgeois critics really objected, but the service of literature to the particular end of social reform. This being the case, they should not offer a blanket objection to literature as propaganda.  

Along the same general lines, the Left sought to point out the class basis of all literature. It followed that all literature was propaganda for some point of view. V. F. Calverton attacked the "above-the-battle" attitude of middle class writers and critics, pointing out that "the writer who adopts it expresses just as definite a social attitude . . . as the writer who takes a definite side in the social struggle." With action the ultimate criterion, the writer or critic who did not engage himself and his work in the class struggle implied his support for the status quo. Such implied support was, in effect, propaganda for capitalism. Ideas like these were the result of the Leftist effort to end the separation between writer-as-artist and writer-as-man. The tree, they felt, was known by the fruit; the

---


At the end of Exile's Return, Malcolm Cowley felt it necessary to address the question "Should artists devote themselves . . . to art or propaganda?", in response to the general critical opinion that the two were antithetical. Cowley dismissed the distinction as phony, based on an outdated Schopenhauerian metaphysic. Today, Cowley said, we recognize that "no single type of human activity . . . can be treated as if it existed separately from all the other types of activity." Thus to think that art could somehow be kept separate from a social function, and hence un-propagandistic, would be absurd. But Cowley did draw a distinction between two ways of working political content into literature--one bad, one good. "If one writes only from the top level of consciousness, in the light of beliefs that have been recently acquired and not assimilated, one is almost certain to write badly, to neglect or distort things that are hidden underneath, to write in a way that is emotionally false and can be dismissed as 'propaganda.' But," Cowley said, "if one has fully absorbed the same beliefs, has felt and lived them, one may treat them in a way that is emotionally effective--that is in other words 'art.'" This distinction emphasizes

23 ibid., pp. 296-97.
again the importance of the involvement of the writer as man in the world around him. Not only was such involvement necessary if he was to become imbued with a sense of life as it was really lived, but as Cowley’s remarks indicate, it was necessary if he was to produce literature which transcended mere propaganda and elevated politically-motivated fiction to the level of art, where it would be most effective.

In this respect Cowley shared opinions with William Phillips and Philip Rahv, editors of the Partisan Review. Phillips and Rahv had appeared upon the revolutionary critical scene relatively late, and the opinions they published in Partisan Review, generally a more "literary" magazine than the politically-oriented New Masses, often antagonized established Marxist critics such as Gold, Hicks, and Calverton. Together with James T. Farrell they led an attack upon "leftism" (sectarianism) in Marxist literary criticism. This had some impact on the proletarian literary movement as it moved into its final phase in late 1935 and 1936. If the establishment position among Marxist literary theorists was that content, and more specifically political content, held primacy over form, Phillips and Rahv dissented. Not that they reversed the priorities; they did not. But they advocated a greater unity of form and content than did the New Masses or Modern Quarterly critics. Like Cowley they thought the form-content duality a false one and believed that properly speaking the two could not be separated or regarded as layers in a literary work. Moreover, they held this opinion not just for aesthetic
reasons—though they were more aesthetically-oriented than their pragmatic colleagues—but for practical reasons as well. Literature was more effective in its own special way if its literary qualities were not subordinated to political ideology. The zeal of "leftism" "to steep literature overnight in the political program of Communism results in the attempt to force the reader's responses through a barrage of sloganized and inorganic writing," they said. "By tacking on political perspectives to awkward literary forms ['leftism'] drains literature of its more specific qualities." Such a practice "paralyzes the writer's capacities by creating a dualism between his artistic consciousness and his beliefs, thus making it impossible for him to achieve anything beyond fragmentary, marginal expression."\(^{24}\) Phillips and Rahv were astute enough to realize that the most effective propaganda must not look like propaganda, for no matter what the message being offered, a certain percentage of readers would resist if it were obvious or superimposed. Therefore they argued that "the question of creative method is primarily a question of the imaginative assimilation of political content" and that

---

must serve as a premise, not as a discovery. This the "leftist" does not do on the grounds that such a method dilutes the political directness that he aims at.

But again, Phillips and Rahv maintained that in being primarily concerned with "political directness" the writer "defeats his purpose, inasmuch as he dissolves action and being in political abstractions." Writers should bear in mind, said Phillips and Rahv, that "literature is a medium steeped in sensory experience, and does not lend itself to the conceptual forms that the social-political content of the class struggle takes most easily. Hence the translation of this content into images of physical life determines— in the esthetic sense— the extent of the writer's achievement."25

Obviously Phillips and Rahv held aesthetic considerations in higher regard than did older revolutionary critics such as Gold, Hicks, and Calverton. Most likely this was because they began their critical careers at a different time and in a different context from those others. By 1934 it was no longer so urgent that radical critics sharply differentiate proletarian literary values from bourgeois standards, as it had been in the twenties. The pendulum had reached the limit of its travel by, say, 1932, and by 1934 was swinging back to a more moderate position.

Something else which moderated from the early days of the radical literary movement to the later was the image of the

25 ibid., pp. 8-9.
Proletarian writer. When Mike Gold broke the first critical ground on the theory of Proletarian literature in 1921, he was working in the context of the American literary radicalism of the World War I years and earlier. That radicalism was of a different character than the Marxist radicalism of the later twenties and thirties: Socialistic rather than Communist. Furthermore, its adherents were a more homogeneous group—mostly working-class immigrants or the children of immigrants, like Gold himself—than the radicals of the thirties, who included large numbers of declassed bourgeoisie and others of middle-class, Anglo-Saxon American background. As the orientation and make-up of the Left literary movement altered over these years, so did its image of the Proletarian writer. For Gold in 1921, the Proletarian writer was a son or daughter of the tenement, whose art was "the tenement pouring out its soul" through them. Because of his own personal orientation, Gold was to cling to the image of the Proletarian writer as a product of the tenement, in one form or another, throughout his career. As I pointed out in Chapter I, when Gold took over editorship of New Masses he threw the magazine's pages open to working class contributors in hopes of discovering some American proletarian Robert Burns. Eight months later he reported that during his tenure as editor "the New Masses has been slowly finding its path toward the goal of a proletarian literature in America," and

he drew a picture of the ideal Proletarian writer:

a wild youth of about twenty-two, the son of working class parents, who himself works in the lumber camps, coal mines, and the steel mills, harvest fields and mountain camps of America. He is sensitive and impatient. He writes in jets of exasperated feeling and has not time to polish his work. He is violent and sentimental by turns. He lacks self-confidence but writes because he must—and because he has a real talent.

He is a Red but has few theories. It is all instinct with him. His writing is no conscious straining after proletarian art, but the natural flower of his environment. He writes that way because it is the only way for him. His "spiritual" attitudes are all mixed up with tenements, factories, lumber camps and steel mills, because that is his life.27

Gold was not alone on the Left in holding this image of the Proletarian writer. When Jack Conroy, the son of the Missouri coal fields, appeared on the radical literary scene in 1933 with The Disinherited, the event was hailed as the discovery, perhaps overdue, of a genuine proletarian Proletarian writer. And the same kind of hope of discovering a diamond in the rough lay behind the New Masses Proletarian novel contest of 1935, the winner of which was the unknown Clara Weatherwax for Marching, Marching!.

But as the Leftist literary movement gained converts from bourgeois letters in the early thirties, the more realistic view that a Proletarian writer could be originally from either class came to be the dominant one. Joseph

27 Gold, "Go Left, Young Writers," p. 4.
Freeman explained in his introduction to Proletarian Literature in the United States that

Often the writer who describes the contemporary world from the viewpoint of the proletariat is not himself a worker. War, unemployment, a widespread social-economic crisis drive middle-class writers into the ranks of the proletariat. Their experience becomes contiguous to or identical with that of the working class; they see their former life, and the life of everyone around them with new eyes; their grasp of experience is conditioned by the class to which they have now attached themselves; they write from the point of view of the revolutionary proletariat; they create what is called proletarian literature.28

In The Liberation of American Literature, V. F. Calverton agreed with Freeman. "Proletarian writers are not necessarily proletarians," he said, "any more than Marx or Lenin were proletarians, but they are writers who are imbued with a proletarian ideology instead of a bourgeois one. They are writers who have adopted the revolutionary point of view of the proletarian ideology, and who try to express that ideology in their work."29

If it was generally agreed that ideology was the determining factor in making a Proletarian writer, most critics held it to be the determining factor in making a Proletarian novel as well. Though there was considerable debate on the issue, the dominant view was that the class of the characters

in a novel did not matter, the setting did not matter, the plot did not matter—the author's ideology alone determined a novel's Proletarianism. Ideology would be the selecting and emphasizing principle, determining how the writer would handle such elements as character, setting, and plot. A typical statement on this point, and one which draws together several of the considerations under discussion by the Left, is that made by Edwin Seaver summarizing the remarks of members of a symposium on the topic "What is a Proletarian Novel?" published in Partisan Review.

The proletarian novel in the U.S., in the present stage of revolutionary crisis, cannot be defined in terms of aesthetics, or in terms of characters or subject matter. It can be defined only in terms of history and of political philosophy: the materialistic dialectic, recognition of the class struggle, acceptance of the historic role of the proletariat in the formation of a new and socialist society. It is not only the class alignment of the novelist that must be considered, not only his acceptance and use of the Marxian interpretation in his work, but the revolutionary purpose of his work, his aim not merely to understand the world and not merely to explain it but to change it.

Seaver's mention of "revolutionary purpose" raises the point that critical discussion of the genre Proletarian novel was devoted as much if not more so to describing its purpose as it was to defining it. In this regard it must be remembered that the radical critics were engaged in breaking entirely

new ground. Marx and Engels had said very little about the revolutionary role of literature, and the comments of Lenin and other Bolsheviks were general and did little to clarify the situation in America, which even in the deepest years of the Depression, was far different from that in Russia in 1917. In short, the American Proletarian critics still had to thrash the problem out. It should also be remembered that these critics were writing, by and large, about a creature they had never seen. Much of the early theoretical discussion of the Proletarian novel was speculation, although grounded, to one degree or another, in Marxism. Furthermore, since the Leftist critics were unanimous in approaching the whole question of the Proletarian novel from the angle of the social utility of literature, it was to be expected that their first concern would be with its purpose, with how the novel worked rather than with what it was. With these thoughts in mind and with the discussion of the Leftist theory of literature with which this chapter opened in the background, let us turn to the more particular theoretical discussions of the function of the Proletarian novel.

We have already seen that the only art worth considering for the literary Left was art with a social purpose. More specifically, the broadest purpose of Proletarian literature was a revolutionary one; as the common formula had it, art was a weapon in the class struggle. But what kind of weapon was it? What were its effects? What were the more immediate
ends that served the general revolutionary purpose? V. F. Calverton said that art was not a "direct weapon" of the sort the proletariat could wield to achieve power. Rather it was "an indirect approach to reality which achieves its greatest strength by virtue of its emotional insights and revelations. . . . One can read a great social novel," he said, "be moved by its power and challenged by its truth, and yet not be stirred to do anything."³¹ For Calverton, Proletarian literature aided in the class struggle first by helping to destroy the present order and second by helping to build the new.³² Proletarian literature could "break the ground" for the establishment of a workers' culture by "exposing the inadequacies and mendacities of bourgeois culture," and it could be of further aid "by encouraging the elements of protest" already existing in bourgeois society and "attempting to give them shape and direction."³³

Calverton's view appears rather conservative, vague, and relaxed when contrasted with Philip Rahv's discussion of the peculiar catharsis of Proletarian literature: "a cleansing through fire." Rahv said that with Proletarian literature a synthesizing third factor is added to the Aristotelian pity and terror—and that is militancy, combativeness. The

³¹ Calverton, "Can We Have a Proletarian Literature?" Modern Quarterly, 6 (Autumn, 1932), 48.
³³ Calverton, "Can We Have a Proletarian Literature?" p. 49.
proletarian katharsis is a release through action—something diametri-
cally opposed to the philosophical resignation of the older idea. Audac-
ciously breaking through the wall that separates literature from life, it impels the reader to a course of action, of militant struggle; it ob-
jectifies art to such a degree that it becomes instrumental in aiding to change the world.34

But the "action" that Rahv had in mind for literature to "im-
pel" was removed a step from the novel itself by the mental state reading it would provoke. Proletarian literature would evoke class-consciousness, which in turn would produce cer-
tain revolutionary acts. As Rahv put it, "every instance of a class-unconscious worker gaining class-consciousness is katharsis, every strike, every militant action, every aggres-
sion on the part of the proletariat is katharsis."35

Granville Hicks provided a description of the purpose of Proletarian literature which seems to unite those of Calverton and Rahv. Hicks said Proletarian literature would "rouse [in the reader] a sense of solidarity with the class-
conscious workers and a loyalty to their cause. But it would do so," he added,

not by exciting the reader to go and do some particular thing, but by creating in him an attitude, an attitude capable of extension and of adaptation to any situation. It would, for example, force the reader to recognize the complete

34 Philip Rahv, "The Literary Class War," New Masses, 8 (August, 1932), 7.
35 ibid., p. 8.
unworthiness of the existing system and the hope and power of the working class. It would give him a view of reality that, if he was by economic status a member of the proletariat or if he was intellectually and emotionally capable of identifying himself with the proletariat, would reveal to him the potentialities and destiny of that class and would galvanize him into action on its behalf.\textsuperscript{36}

In other words the Proletarian novel was to affect readers as other sources of the Marxian interpretation of life had affected the Leftist critics. To use Hicks' words, the Proletarian novel would create an attitude--revolutionary consciousness--which would be the basis for further unspecified acts. The writer's job was not especially to move workers to strike or storm some government building, but to tell the Marxist story through the affecting medium of fiction, to communicate (as Calverton had said) the Marxist interpretation of life to the as yet ungalvanized masses. Once the masses saw the contemporary situation analyzed, explained, and dramatized in a novel, revolutionary action would take care of itself. The experience of all the writers who had swung Left would be repeated analogically by the newly class-conscious proletariat.

A good many of the assumptions of the Leftist literary theorists and their ideas about the ends and means of the Proletarian novel are condensed in a passage from Granville Hicks' 1933 \textit{New Masses} essay "The Crisis in American Criticism."

\textsuperscript{36} Granville Hicks, "The Crisis in American Criticism," p. 5.
In setting down guidelines for evaluative criteria, Hicks touched on all the points under discussion in this chapter—the ends of Proletarian literature, the best means to those ends, and the attitude, approach, and viewpoint required of the Proletarian novelist—so that it is worth quoting at length. "If the Marxian theory of history is sound," Hicks wrote,

an adequate portrayal of life as it is would lead the proletarian reader to recognize his role in the class struggle. Therefore a book could be judged by its ability to have that kind of effect. But the critic will judge the book, not by its direct effect on himself, but by the qualities that contribute to its possible effect on the attitudes of a certain class of readers. He will insist, for example, on centrality of subject matter: the theme must deal with or be related to the central issues of life. Obviously the novel must, directly or indirectly, show the effects of the class struggle, since, according to Marxism, that is central in life, and no novel that disregarded it could give an adequate portrayal of life. The critic also will insist on intensity: the author must be able to make the reader feel that he is participating in the lives described whether they are the lives of bourgeois or of proletarians. The peculiar function of literature demands this, since it is on intensity that all the various ways of affecting attitudes depend. But it is not to be thought that intensity is merely, or even principally, a matter of technique. On the contrary, intensity is primarily a result of the author's capacity for the assimilation and understanding of experience, and this in turn is related to his attitude towards life. For this reason and for others, the critic will demand, in the third place, that the author's point of view be that of the vanguard of the proletariat. The Marxist theory of knowledge . . . requires this.
And inasmuch as literature grows out of the author's entire personality, his identification with the proletariat should be as complete as possible. He should not merely believe in the cause of the proletariat; he should be, or should try to make himself, a member of the proletariat.

Hicks' remarks are very revealing. The purpose of Proletarian literature is to effect the reader's recognition of his role in the class struggle. This end is best achieved by presenting an accurate portrayal of life as it is from the Marxian viewpoint, but a portrayal rendered with sufficient intensity to move the reader to identification with the proletarian cause and characters. But this intensity is not a matter of technique; it is a matter of the writer's political enlightenment--i.e., the Marxist point of view--and his personal involvement with the proletariat. Traditionally, critics have held that intensity in a novel is a matter of technique, of craftsmanship, and that the writer's political orientation is irrelevant. But if for Hicks--and Gold and Calverton--intensity was not a function of craftsmanship but a matter of the ability of the writer as man to assimilate and understand experience, then the whole question of the proper means to the end of the Proletarian novel comes down to realism. The novel achieves its revolutionary purpose by seeming intensely real to proletarian readers. Thus formal considerations are very nearly swept aside altogether.

ibid., p. 5.
in keeping with the general Leftist elevation of life over art. In fact one finds in the radical critical discussion of the Proletarian novel very little concerning technical matters; the majority of it is devoted to matters of content and treatment, under which heading I am placing realism. If it is surprising that the Leftists thought intensity a matter of the writer's viewpoint rather than his skill, it becomes perhaps less so when we consider the alleged scientific nature of the Marxian analysis. The Marxist interpretation of history was (and of course still is by its proponents) presented not as a mystical insight or divine revelation but as a scientifically objective, coldly realistic understanding. From this idea, the Leftists critics built their enormous faith in facts. If the writer merely presented the facts of economic and social life under a decaying capitalist order, and if he had sufficient perspicacity and conviction, then the intensity with which he himself had felt reality would come across to his readers. Formal considerations, relatively unimportant anyway, would more or less take care of themselves if the writer did his job of faithfully rendering reality. It was reality which would impress the relatively unsophisticated proletarian reader especially, not dilettantish literary techniques. In this connection, Hicks reminded the American novelist at the end of The Great Tradition that "if he [were] wise, he would find in facts his all-sufficient bulwark" against
literary irrelevance and inauthenticity. Mike Gold reminded his readers time and again of the supremacy of a factual presentation of life. To select just two examples, in his column in the January, 1930, number of New Masses he extolled the virtues of factual writing: "Facts are the new poetry. The proletarian writer will cut away from the stale plots, love stories, ecstasies and verbal heroisms of the fictionists of the past. He will work with facts. Facts are his strength. Facts are his passion. He will not worry too much about form. Facts create their own new form." Nine months later in the same column Gold set down some of the elements he saw as part of this "new form," "Proletarian Realism." Among them: the Proletarian writer would describe the workers' work "with technical precision"; he would deal with "the real conflicts of men and women who work for a living," as opposed to the "precious silly little agonies" of bourgeois characters; he would indulge in "no straining or melodrama or other effects [because] life itself is the supreme melodrama. Feel this intensely, and everything else becomes poetry--the new poetry of materials, of the so-called 'common man,' the Worker moulding his real world."

To touch briefly again on a matter discussed earlier in

38 Hicks, The Great Tradition, p. 305.
40 Gold, "Notes of the Month," (September, 1930), p. 5.
this chapter, the radicals' dedication to realism provided them with a defense against the negative implications of "propaganda." In one of his long theoretical discussions of the characteristics of the Proletarian novel, V. F. Calverton said that it must "reveal . . . the social struggle in whatever field it undertakes to tackle, not . . . by means of argument or preaching, which are the devices of the pamphleteer, but by conflict of characters and organization of materials." And Joseph Freeman, in the introduction to Proletarian Literature in the United States, endorsed the position of Soviet critics who said that the Proletarian writer "does not repeat party theses; he communicates that experience out of which the theses arose." The negative connotation of "propaganda" that suggested an artificial arrangement of reality in support of a political thesis was avoided if Proletarian writers dealt only in facts and handled them with a scientific objectivity.

It would be a mistake to think that in their emphasis on realism the Proletarian writers and critics were as radical as they were in their politics. Despite the fact that Mike Gold thought the attention to facts a "new poetry," literary realism had been the dominant mode in American fiction since Howells promoted it in the 1880's. Furthermore

41 Calverton, "Can We Have a Proletarian Literature?" p. 50.
42 Freeman, "Introduction," Proletarian Literature in the United States, p. 11.
it had been reasserted in the 1920's by such politically varied writers as Dos Passos, Dreiser, and Hemingway. The radicalism which the thirties Leftists attached to realistic writing had its roots in the attitudes of the earlier generation of literary rebels, the Bohemian Socialists of the first two decades of the century. Those earlier writers saw reality, viewed "scientifically" through the instruments of Darwinism and Freudianism as well as Marxism, as itself radical inasmuch as it punctured the sentimentalized and genteel picture of life offered by the "Puritan" tradition against which they were rebelling. Moreover, the emphasis on realism in the thirties, as well as the notion of the importance of the writer's involvement in the events which were to provide the subject matter for his writing, has connections to the "radical journalism" promoted by early Socialists such as John Reed and Lincoln Steffens, not to mention the tradition of the Muckrakers. Radical journalism meant that the reporter must not be merely "the mirror of events, but a participant in their outcome," and it meant the reporter's involvement in social change by his attention to unpleasant aspects of reality that cried out for change. When radical writers in the twenties and thirties went to Gastonia, North Carolina, or Harlan, Kentucky, to take part in and report on strikes or labor organization drives, they were practicing the prescribed social involvement and

demonstrating their rejection of ivory-tower aestheticism. But they were also operating in the tradition, older than the Proletarian literary movement, of radical journalism. And when they treated realistically in novels the events of a strike or union organizing rally or confrontation between workers and police they differed from the bourgeois writers of the twenties only in their selection of events for portrayal, not in the treatment itself.

American literary naturalism is also in the background of the Proletarian novel of the thirties. Marxism has been among the contributors to the anti-individualistic and deterministic weltanschauung which produced literary naturalism, although for the Marxists themselves economic and historic inevitability was supposed to be comforting, not frightening or nihilistic in its implications. Proletarian aesthetic theory also shared with naturalism the ideal of the writer's objectivity and "scientific" approach to reality. V. F. Calverton, writing in the mid-twenties, presented the Proletarian ethos as one enlightened by science in contrast to "bourgeois prejudice." This meant that the Proletarian novel, like the naturalistic, could be more open and less repressed on matters of sex. And Calverton went on to contrast the Proletarian novel with the bourgeois novel in a manner that shows a marked kinship to naturalistic emphases. The rise of the proletariat, said Calverton, has rendered obsolete the sermonical novel. Under the new enlightenment,
the bourgeois attitude toward the obliquities and perversities of human action, the reverse of intelligent and generous, becomes understandable [sic] and magnanimous when transformed into the proletarian. Crime is conceived as a product of conditions and not of the innate wickedness of human nature. Condemnation is turned to pity, and punishment into treatment. . . . Evil in characters is pictured without the attempt to make them hideous, but to reveal the injustice of a social system, of the iniquity of circumstance.  

The intention to reveal social injustice, however, was one element that separated Proletarian novels from naturalistic fiction. In his outline of literary naturalism, V. L. Parrington mentions as chief among the "temptations" befalling naturalistic writers that of abandoning objectivity and scientific detachment to partisanship. This describes the Proletarian writers perfectly, and Walter Rideout finds it "paradoxical" that "the chief monument of naturalism in the 1930's," Farrell's *Studs Lonigan*, is also a proletarian novel.


46 Rideout, *The Radical Novel in the United States*, p. 211. Rideout observes that "when the proletarian novelists insisted that their snapshots of strikes, demonstrations, conversions were exact portraits of the social developments [sic] implicit in that given point of history, they were not accurately photographing what a Marxist would call 'the objective situation' existing in the United States during the 1930's. . . . If they were photographically realistic in their literary techniques, the angle from which they set up their cameras and the type of lens they favored could distort the perspective of the finished picture, all the more so if the photographer himself were unfamiliar with his equipment."
The greatest variation between literary Proletarianism and naturalism, however, was on the question of the implications of a deterministic world, and diverging from this point is one of the most significant identifying characteristics of the Proletarian novel; that is what was known as "revolutionary optimism." The naturalistic portrayal of a world operating under blind chance or chemical forces and in which the individual will served only as a source of ironic frustration led of course to pessimistic conclusions of the sort Theodore Dreiser drew in his fiction. But the Proletarian writers, emphasizing economic and historical forces more than biological ones and the values of collectivism as opposed to individualism, saw no such gloomy picture. As Granville Hicks had said at the conclusion of The Great Tradition, the Marxist writer could by virtue of his Marxism, not only "perceive the operation of underlying forces" but "rejoice in their play because of his confidence in what they will eventually accomplish. This was the doctrine of revolutionary optimism, which was the prescribed attitude with which the Proletarian novelist was to approach the reality he depicted in his books and which was to be communicated to the reader. In his outline of the elements of "Proletarian Realism," Mike Gold asked Proletarian writers to do "away with drabness, the bourgeois notion that the Worker's life is sordid, the slum-mer's disgust and feeling of futility. There is horror and

47 Hicks, The Great Tradition, p. 305 (emphasis mine).
drabness in the Worker's life," he admitted, "and we will portray it; but we know this is not the last word; we know that this manure heap is the hope of the future; we know that not pessimism, but revolutionary elan will sweep this mess out of the world forever." To the Marxist this knowledge was realistic, not just wishful thinking, even though it was optimistic. In their images of themselves as hard-boiled realists, the Leftists liked to avoid suggestions that they were romantics, with the overtones of sentimentality that the term carries. V. F. Calverton even went so far as to call Proletarian literature "classical [rather] than romantic" in its concerns with "events, developments, things epical, wars, revolutions, social struggles," as opposed to "things individualistic which was the main concern of the romantics throughout the nineteenth century." But the notion of revolutionary optimism forced them to recognize the romantic element in the theory of Proletarian fiction and to attempt some kind of synthesizing formulation. As Walter Rideout observes "even those [Proletarian] . . . novels which use the most realistic fictional techniques have about them something . . . of literary romanticism." Rideout quotes Edwin Seaver on the topic of "Socialist Realism" from a 1935 New Masses article. Seaver's comments are indicative

48 Gold, "Notes of the Month," (September, 1930), p. 5.
49 Calverton, "Can We Have a Proletarian Literature?" p. 45.
50 Rideout, p. 211.
of the Leftist attempt to comprehend both romanticism and realism in the critical theory. "The concept of socialist realism," he said, "... demands that the author realize all the contradictions, the contrarieties and the complexities of the world in crisis; ... that the artist not only see things as they are--statically, but where they are going--dynamically." Seaver goes on in the article to assert that "socialist realism does away with the split between realism and romanticism" and cites Bukharin as verification:

"If socialist realism is distinguished by its active, operative character; if it does not give just a dry photograph of a process; if it raises the heroic principle to the throne of history--then revolutionary romanticism is a component part of it. ... Socialist realism does not merely register what exists, but catching up the thread of developments in the present, it leads it into the future, and leads it actively. Hence an antithesis between romanticism and socialist realism is devoid of all meaning." 51

Similarly, Edwin Berry Burgum thought that revolutionary optimism effected a synthesis between romanticism and classicism. Defining classicism as "the survival of the materialistic absolute of Aristotle" and consequently a "'closed' form" and romanticism as the survival of "the idealistic absolute of transcendental philosophy" and consequently an "'open'" form, Burgum said "the Marxian form of proletarian fiction so accepts and opposes both as to transform them into

a third, which is the reflection in fiction of the dialectic materialistic conception of history." The manifestation of this synthesis in the novel would be the reader's realization that

the whole novel is only an episode in a conflict to be continued in time, but a conflict to be continued definitely in a certain direction, to a certain outcome, to the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat. This "open" form, however, is not "open" in the romantic sense since the direction is established, and is not into a world of absolute ideas but rather into a new stage in the materialistic development of history. This fact determines the note of belief and optimism which must define the conclusion of the proletarian novel.52

According to Burgum, a Proletarian novel could end as Grace Lumpkin's To Make My Bread did, with a defeated strike, and still be optimistic in the revolutionary sense since Marxism assured the ultimate triumph of the proletariat in the class struggle and any defeat was only a temporary setback. The Proletarian novel may be pessimistic about the bourgeoisie, Burgum said, but it is "never pessimistic about the class-conscious proletariat [because] . . . both by observation of American life and by Marxist theory the proletariat is defined as class-conscious when it acts in the belief that only its conscious cooperation is necessary to promote

52 "What is a Proletarian Novel?" p. 11.
the immediate direction of history towards the dictatorship of the proletariat."  

As I have noted above, the Leftist discussion of the formal or practical elements of the Proletarian novel was very limited in comparison to the discussion of theoretical and philosophical matters, which is perhaps surprising in view of the widespread prescriptivism to be found in the theoretical criticism. But as Edwin Seaver told the First American Writers' Congress, the author's ideological orientation was highly important precisely because artistic matters were to be left up to his discretion.  

Thus even discussions such as Partisan Review's symposium on "What is a Proletarian Novel?" and Mike Gold's article on the elements of "Proletarian Realism" contain little of practical worth to the novelist, who was to follow his own lead when it came to putting the Proletarian theory into practice. In fact one Proletarian writer, Robert Cantwell, complained of the lack of specific guidance in New Masses criticism when that magazine questioned several writers on the point for a piece entitled "Authors' Field Day."  

Certain philosophical tenets of Marxism of course carried rather particular implications for the

---

53 ibid., p. 9.


55 "Authors' Field Day: A Symposium on Marxist Criticism," New Masses, 3 July 1934, p. 27.
practice of the novel. As Walter Rideout has noted, for instance,

the widespread insistence that art was a weapon gave the ending of a story a disproportionate importance. Here obviously was the place where the reader could most emphatically be shown that what ought to be was in the process of becoming, and indeed radical critics and reviewers often adopted a kind of theory of literary ballistics: the most effective book like the most effective rifle was that with highest velocity at the muzzle. Hence revolutionary optimism was considered a necessity; any hint of pessimism or defeatism might lower the explosive power of the charge.\textsuperscript{56}

From this, Proletarian authors knew the shape their plots were to take, leading toward an effective conclusion. Jack Conroy might have paid too close attention to this stricture in \textit{The Disinherited}; one of the most common critical observations about the book, even among contemporary Leftist reviewers, is that its stock revolutionary optimistic ending does not follow logically from the rest of the story.

It was not until 1934, however, that revolutionary critics produced any kind of detailed discussion devoted to how novelist-istic technique could be employed to serve the ends that Marxist theoretical criticism had established for the Proletarian novel. At that time, Granville Hicks wrote a seven-part essay for \textit{New Masses} entitled "Revolution and the Novel" whose purpose Hicks said was to "try to point out the manifold

\textsuperscript{56}Rideout, p. 222.
possibilities of the novel by commenting concretely on both themes and methods." In the several installments of the article, Hicks discussed the suitability of the past and the future for treatment by the Proletarian novelist, recommended the development of the "collective" novel (one with a group in "a position analagous to that of the hero in conventional fiction"), commented on the merits of the dramatic and biographical novel forms, discussed the treatment of proletarian and bourgeois characters, considered the various narrative points of view the Proletarian novelist might adopt, and lectured on the importance of emphasizing sociological conditions in the created world of the novel in such a way that they would correspond to elements of the class struggle in the real world. On the last point, it is interesting to note that Hicks devoted one entire 3,000-word installment to what boils down to the message "be realistic with Marxist eyesight" and calls it "Problems of Documentation." From this it is evident how intricately bound up were political orthodoxy and literary realism for the Marxists.

But for all this, Hicks' recommendations amounted mostly to general--and familiar--guidelines for writers to follow. "Revolution and the Novel" was hardly a technical manual for the Proletarian novel or even a practical manifesto of the


58 ibid., p. 27.
sort the Imagists or the "revolution-in-the-wordists" had produced earlier. Hicks' advice may have been helpful to some young writer beginning his career as a Proletarian novelist, but, to repeat, for the most part Proletarian novelists were on their own in trying to put into the practice the general theory of the Proletarian novel.
Chapter III
The Proletarian Novel in Practice

Before we turn to an examination of the practice of the Proletarian novel as seen in four selected representative works, a summary of its underlying principles and assumptions is in order, as well as some generalizations about the practice of the Proletarian novel.

Briefly, in subject and theme the Proletarian novel was committed to depicting the class struggle, which its authors held to be the central reality of the day. In application, as will be seen in the discussion which follows, this meant the depiction of various kinds of conflict. Most broadly, there was the presentation of the human struggle for survival against the injustices of life. As such, the conflict was not specifically political in emphasis. To give it a political cast, the Proletarian novelist presented his characters in class terms and exposed the economic roots of the forces with which they struggled for survival. More narrowly, depiction of the class struggle meant a dramatization of the Marxian dialectic: conflict between proletarian and bourgeois characters or between bourgeois characters and history itself, implying the inevitable defeat of such characters. In any case, the depiction of
the class struggle emphasized the virtues, the "hope and power," of the proletariat and the "unworthiness" of the capitalist system, the "inadequacies and mendacities of bourgeois culture."¹

In terms of treatment, the Proletarian novelist stressed realism and revolutionary optimism. He sought to achieve realism through intensity of impression, which depended upon his personal immersion in the milieu of his characters' lives and his rendition of the facts of that experience. To express revolutionary optimism, the Proletarian novelist sought to resolve conflict in terms of the Marxist vision: to present a triumph of the proletariat over the existing system. He tried to portray the coming to fruition of the values embodied in class-conscious characters' lives, or else the defeat of bourgeois characters who were unable to recognize reality.

In addition to these cardinal principles of subject and treatment, the nature of the audience was important in determining the practice of the Proletarian novelist. His audience consisted of the potentially- but as yet un-class-conscious proletariat and the potentially or actually de-classed bourgeoisie who would ultimately join with the proletariat in revolutionary action. For the Leftists, literature was to provide the galvanizing spark, awakening readers

¹ The first two quotes are from Granville Hicks, "The Crisis in American Criticism," New Masses, 8 (February, 1933), 5; the last is from V. F. Calverton, "Can We Have a Proletarian Literature?" Modern Quarterly, 6 (Autumn, 1932), 48.
to Marxist reality. Such an audience, though politically defined, was a much broader one than serious writers in the twentieth century had become used to writing for. It was more nearly a popular audience and one defined by socio-economic class, not by the degree of its taste or erudition. Consequently, it was an audience relatively unsophisticated in matters of literary technique. The expectations of this audience in a period of economic collapse and the evangelistic fervor of Proletarian writers combined to place the emphasis on the factual and emotional content of a novel, rather than on literary technique. Therefore its theorists tended to de-emphasize subtlety and complexity in the Proletarian novel, although its practitioners did not always follow these prescriptions. The maverick nature of many writers made it difficult for them to be politically, much less aesthetically regimented. They were as committed to literature as they were to revolution, and they tended to find their own way in the practice of the Proletarian novel. Still, the didactic and evangelistic intention of such writers remained; they sought to communicate a radical perception of American life and to that extent tended to produce novels that are more didactic than what modern criticism considers acceptable for literary art.

Part I of Wayne C. Booth's *The Rhetoric of Fiction* and Martin Steinmann's essay "The Old Novel and the New" describe the modern critical and aesthetic preference for novels from which the author has "exited," leaving his opinions about
characters and events to the reader's inference, though that inference may be guided by such literary devices as irony and symbol. Ever since Henry James first showed some of the artistic possibilities available to a novelist through silencing his own reliable voice and manipulating point of view, writers and critics alike have preferred novels which proceed by dramatic showing instead of by authoritative telling.² It is Booth's thesis, of course, that modern novels are rhetorical in spite of the reorientation of the novelist vis à vis his audience, and that that rhetoric merely takes a different form from the direct address of reader by writer that it generally took in the pre-Jamesian novel. This formal difference defines the literary quality of the modern novel, and in this respect the Proletarian novel is something of a throwback to the "old" novel. Because it had an avowedly utilitarian purpose and a specific political message and because of the anti-aesthetic bias of many of its leading theorists and practitioners, the Proletarian novel tended to be direct in the communication of its meaning to the audience. With art considered an instrument for social change, conflicts between a novel's political and artistic aims tended to be resolved in favor of the politics. It was more important

that the audience got the political point than that it admired artistic accomplishment. Thus by current aesthetic standards, Proletarian novels are commonly dismissed en masse as mere propaganda. While it is true that Proletarian novels tend to be more "propagandistic" than "artistic," such blanket condemnation is both oversimplified and unfair.

The present study will attempt to adumbrate the variation in the practice of the Proletarian novel, given its propagandistic purpose and generally open rhetorical nature. For this purpose I have designated the opposite ends of a scale of novelistic treatment as "simple" and "complex." Toward the "simple" end of the scale I place those novels whose political purpose is most obvious to the casual reader (assuming the original audience of Proletarian novels to have been composed of such readers and not literary scholars). Their relative simplicity derives from the high degree of directness with which their political message is communicated to the reader. The indirect rhetorical devices which have come to be identified with the literary quality of a novel since the work of early modern novelists such as James, Conrad, Joyce, Woolf, and Ford tend to be de-emphasized in the "simple" novels in favor of direct statement and reliable commentary. Moreover, the degree of aesthetic distance between both author and characters and reader and characters increases from the "simple" novels to the "complex." Thus the "simple" novels seem less "literary" and more clearly "propagandistic." By the same token, I place toward the
"complex" end of the scale those novels which appear to have literary intentions in at least equal measure with their political intentions and which consequently may seem less obviously propagandistic. The relative "complexity" of these novels derives from the high degree of indirectness with which their political message is communicated. They show a greater use of characteristically "literary" rhetorical devices to suggest political meaning in the absence of the direct means of reliable commentary. In short, whereas the "simple" novels tend to "tell" the reader their political message, the "complex" novels tend to "show" it. Let me emphasize that none of the four novels examined here is absolutely simple or complex by these measures. The relatively simple novels contain elements which by the above criteria are complex, and the relatively complex novels are in some respects simple. What I am concerned with in placing each novel on the scale is the overall impression of its propagandistic and literary qualities, a determination justified by the instrumental purpose the Proletarian novel was held to have had by its theorists and practitioners. Accordingly, the four novels under consideration in this chapter, listed in order from the most "simple" to the most "complex," are Michael Gold's Jews Without Money (Liveright, 1930), Jack Conroy's The Disinherited (Covici-Friede, 1933), Robert Cantwell's The Land of Plenty (Farrar and Rinehart, 1934), and James T. Farrell's Studs Lonigan (Vanguard Press, 1935).

3 The three volumes of Studs Lonigan were published
In addition to showing something of the variation in execution of the Proletarian novel, these four works represent each of the categories of the genre according to subject that Walter Rideout defines in his survey of The Radical Novel in the United States, 1900-1954. Jews Without Money is a "bottom dogs" novel, The Disinherited a conversion novel, The Land of Plenty a strike novel, and Studs Lonigan a novel of the decay of the middle class.  

This division into simple and complex novels has a parallel in the division of radical critics in the early thirties into leftist and centrist camps. The disagreement between the two factions revolved around the question of the subordination of literary values to political orthodoxy. Generally, the New Masses critics, led by Michael Gold and Granville Hicks, held to the view that the political message of Proletarian fiction was of paramount importance, a belief that is reflected in Gold's novel Jews Without Money and in Jack Conroy's The Disinherited, the favorite of the New Masses critics. The centrist camp, more closely identified with the Partisan Review and critics such as Philip Rahv and


James T. Farrell, generally supported literary values over political ones; thus when Farrell reviewed *The Disinherited*, he found it wanting, and his *Studs Lonigan* falls into my "complex" category.  

Four factors necessitate a rhetorical approach to the Proletarian novels included for study here: first, the fact that radical critics in general promoted Proletarian literature as communicative rather than expressive; second, the didactic purpose of Proletarian novelists themselves; third, the nature of the audience for those novels; fourth, my interest in the novels as examples of the practice of a specific critical theory virtually unique in twentieth-century American letters. I will consider each of the four novels in terms of its rhetorical strategies to accomplish a desired end. More specifically, I will consider each novel in the broad terms of subject and treatment, approaching these two areas in terms of several questions. Concerning subject, how does each novel present the class struggle as its central subject and what thematic variations are worked upon that subject? In terms of treatment, what variations in the recommended realism does each author adopt? How does each writer achieve realism and especially intensity of impression? How does he use such elements as narration, character, plot structure, descriptive detail, and symbol and imagery to make his doctrinal point? How and to what extent does he communicate

---

revolutionary optimism? Finally, what may we expect the effect of the writer's choices to have been on his intended audience? Each of these questions is not equally applicable to each of the four novels; variations in subject and treatment make different considerations relevant to different novels. Nevertheless, enough continuity does exist among them that, together with those variations, it provides a sense of how the novels compare with respect to simplicity and complexity, the direct and indirect communication of a Marxist viewpoint.

**Jews Without Money**

It was fitting that the first American Proletarian novel should have been written by Michael Gold. In 1930, when *Jews Without Money* was published, Gold had been urging the creation of an American Proletarian literature for nearly a decade. *Jews Without Money* follows many of Gold's critical prescriptions. In it Gold concentrates on relating the "facts" of workers' lives, including the "horror and drabness," but without "the slummer's disgust and feeling of futility."\(^6\) *Jews Without Money* instead seems genuine in the quality of its revolutionary optimism; Gold's belief that "not pessimism, but revolutionary elan will sweep this mess out of the world forever" is clearly communicated. Further, Gold amply

\(^6\) All quotes in this paragraph are from Gold's column "Notes of the Month," *New Masses*, 6 (September, 1930), 5.
illustrates his idea of the Proletarian novelist as an untrained and unpolished but authentic and sincere working-class genius, concerned with facts first and form a distant second, with conveying his intense feeling that "life itself is the supreme melodrama." Jews Without Money is the most overtly political of the four novels to be examined in this chapter. In fact, it is less a novel than a collection of Gold's anecdotal reminiscences about his childhood on Manhattan's Lower East Side, a sort of urban, working-class, less fictionalized Winesburg, Ohio. The episodes are related to acquaint the reader with what life there was like for poor immigrant European Jews in the first decade or so of the twentieth century. Gold gives his account of that life a novelistic cast by fictionalizing his characters and by acting as a storyteller who presents selected episodes for his audience's political edification. His literary technique is primitive, and the presence of his own reliable voice commenting upon the events he relates provides the audience a clear understanding of Gold's political position, even though that position is more broadly humanitarian than pointedly Marxist.

There is little plot in Jews Without Money. Although there is conflict, in vignettes showing the struggle of the Jews to survive in the midst of the poverty, alienation, and corruption which are the conditions of their lives in the Lower East Side ghetto, the only progress or development that occurs is chronological until the final page. The earliest
episodes are from Gold's early childhood, when he was five years old, and the latest occur after his commencement from elementary school, when he was in his early teens. There is little character development. Many of the characters appear in only one or two episodes, and those that do not are static in personality throughout. Mike himself does gain class consciousness at the end of the novel; it comes on him in a flash when he hears "a man on an East Side soap-box" proclaim that "out of the despair, melancholy and helpless rage of millions, a world movement had been born to abolish poverty." Gold devotes only a half dozen sentences, fewer than one hundred words, at the very end of the novel to his conversion. There is no gradual leading up to his changed consciousness; Mike is not shown developing revolutionary awareness. Nor does Gold use his changed consciousness to advance any plot by, for instance, using his newfound awareness in revolutionary action to proselytize or lead the Jews without money to solidarity. Instead the climactic epiphany merely accounts for the political opinions which Gold has offered throughout in commenting upon the scenes of his childhood. Thus the subject of Jews Without Money classifies it more correctly as a "bottom dogs" novel than as a "conversion" novel.


8 On this point I am in disagreement with Rideout. He classes Jews Without Money among the conversion novels,
Gold does attach a thematic interest to his subject in *Jews Without Money* by considering the lives of the immigrants in terms of the issue of the corruption of innocence. This, the book suggests, is the essence of the immigrant Jewish experience in America, and by attributing the corruption of the innocent Jews to the evils of capitalism, Gold attaches class-struggle significance to his subject. This theme unifies the novel. Complexity is provided through the thematic motif of false and true Messiahs, a motif deeply rooted in the subculture which Gold has taken for his subject.

It is in such aspects of Gold's treatment of his subject as character, symbol, and narrative strategy that *Jews Without Money* 's simplicity lies. Gold makes direct rhetorical use of each of these to communicate the point that capitalist America foists an unacceptable class system upon the immigrant Jews: it imprisons them physically in the Lower East Side and economically in poverty; the poor are often corrupted and perverted into becoming prostitutes, rapists, or thugs; those who escape such fates experience the more subtle and insidious corruption of filthy lucre, pursuing the false Messiah of bourgeois respectability at the price of human decency. Establishing this as a thesis, Gold offers as an antithesis the "workers' Revolution" which will "abolish poverty" without the taint of corruption that attends the rise to the bourgeoisie. Although he admits that "in some respects" it could be considered a bottom dogs novel (313n).
The manner in which Jews Without Money is narrated is the central fact in the novel's simplicity. The opening sentence of the novel, "I can never forget the East Side street where I lived as a boy" (13), establishes that the reader is about to hear the reminiscences of an adult who is virtually identical with the author of the book. The negligible distance between author and narrator makes this adult voice a reliable spokesman for the author's norms in the novel, and Gold uses this adult voice throughout to make direct political commentary. The adult narrator is free to select whatever episodes from his childhood he wishes to present. Also, throughout the narrative Gold moves back and forth between his young self's limited awareness of the meaning of what happens around him and his adult self's full revolutionary consciousness. The politically unaware child is unable to draw political conclusions from his experience. In fact, radical conclusions do not necessarily follow from the experience itself. The reader may infer such conclusions

Booth makes a distinction between the "implied author" of a novel and the actual person who is a writer (70 ff). However, I know of no novel in which the difference between the two is less than it is in Jews Without Money. The emphasis in the Proletarian literary movement on the elimination of the distinction between artist-as-artist and artist-as-man and the prescription of the artist's involvement in life and radical political activity produced a tendency toward writers adopting their personal experience for fictional treatment in the Proletarian novel. All of the novels dealt with in this chapter, as well as several others, show this tendency, but in none is the experience less fictionalized, and the implied author more nearly the real author, than in Jews Without Money.
as life for the Jews in the tenement is nasty, brutish, and short; or the love of money is the root of all evil; or immigrant Jews were outsiders in pre-World War I America; but he may not develop a specifically revolutionary consciousness from the facts and experiences that Gold presents by themselves. However, Gold came to a radical conclusion from his experience, and he tries to shape his narrative toward it by having his narrator offer reliable commentary on the facts presented. In this way the novel becomes, to borrow Wordsworth's formula, experience recollected, not in tranquility as much as in political awareness.\textsuperscript{10} If events were narrated consistently from the limited awareness of the child's point of view, as Henry Roth does in \textit{Call It Sleep}, \textit{Jews Without Money} would be a more complex novel.\textsuperscript{11} But Gold is interested more in political directness than in artistic indirectness.

If direct reliable commentary is useful in making sure the reader understands the novel's political message, it will not provide the intensity of realistic impression required

\textsuperscript{10} The identity of author and literary speaker that characterized Romanticism applies to much of the American Proletarian novel as well. Despite the disclaimers of theorists such as Calverton, Hicks, and others who spurned any suggestion of sentimentality and Romanticism in connection with what they insisted was the coldly "realistic," "scientific," or "classical" orientation of Proletarian literature, the entire movement rested more on Romantic assumptions than they were willing to admit. Gold was the biggest "Romantic" of them all, but then he openly worshipped at the altar of Whitman.

\textsuperscript{11} Rideout observes that \textit{Jews Without Money} is to \textit{Call It Sleep} as Coleridge's "fancy" is to his "imagination," p. 187.
for the literary effect to work. Therefore some narration from the child's point of view is called for. Especially in the early chapters, Gold plays heavily on the shock value of having a child relate the seamy details of ghetto life: whores and pimps plying their trade in broad daylight in the streets, gamblers shooting it out in the tenement's backyard the night of Mike's fifth birthday, diseased and dangerous alley cats filling the tenement halls with their miserable struggle for survival. Seeing these things in the novel from the child's point of view heightens its intensity for the reader. Likewise, Gold must use the point of view of his politically unconscious young self if the novel's epiphanic ending is to achieve its desired effect; the reader has to see, not just be told about, the fifteen-year-old Mike's discovery of the revolution, even if he does know from the direct commentary throughout the novel that Mike grew up to attain a radical consciousness. Moreover, the child's limited awareness allows for the operation of the novel's crude symbolism. Finally, the child's point of view is essential to the corruption-of-innocence theme. The idea of this corruption can be made especially shocking if, in addition to seeing adults fall victim to the lures of filthy lucre, the reader

12 See Booth, Chapters II, VII, and X, for discussion of the aids to achieving an impression of realism in a novel and the respective uses of authorial commentary and silence.

13 Booth discusses the use of symbol as an alternative means to reliable commentary in communicating the author's values, pp. 196 and 272.
can see a childish innocence corrupted by the morbid realities of the poverty in which the immigrant Jews must live as a result of their social and economic segregation by bourgeois American capitalism. Such is the effect of much of the detail in the early chapters showing the ingredients of daily life on the Lower East Side. Here Gold presents the climate of sexual corruption—open solicitation by prostitutes, gang rapes which are matters of common knowledge—that was his habitat as a youngster.

The story of Louis One-Eye, related as the central episode in Chapter Eleven, illustrates both the presence of the corruption-of-innocence theme and Gold's narrative strategy at work as he slips back and forth between events he saw and experienced as a youth and his mature political reactions to those recollected events. The episode also shows Gold's crude symbolism at work, its operation made possible because the episode is narrated by the young Mike. Louis One-Eye is the most feared and hated thug in young Mike's neighborhood, and in this episode he attempts to assault Mike's pure, sweet, and beautiful Aunt Lena while young Mike watches in fear. To make sure the reader gets the correct political understanding of the story of Louis One-Eye, the voice of the mature Gold enters to tell what young Mike does not yet know, that it is "the State" that had made a monster of Louis One-Eye by turning "a moody unhappy boy into this evil rattlesnake" (129). Louis had been sent to a reformatory at the age of fourteen because he had pushed his father out of a window
when the man tried to beat Louis's mother. "There the state 'reformed' him by teaching him to be a criminal and by robbing him of his eye" through a beating with a belt administered by a guard (128). These remarks occur near the beginning of the chapter, when Gold is giving a general description of Louis. From this point he goes on to relate the incident of the attempted assault on Aunt Lena. The chapter's last paragraph shows Gold's voice slipping from child to adult, and the object of his adult bitterness: "Everyone went on hating Louis One-Eye, and I did too. Now I hate more those who took an East Side boy and trained him into a monster useful to bosses in strikes and to politicians on election day" (140).

The symbolism in this chapter involves the pigeons that Louis One-Eye keeps in his tenement-roof bailiwick. Describing how as a child he and his friends would secretly watch Louis with his pigeons, Gold tells that the pigeons in flight "seemed so free and beautiful, we envied them." As Louis whistled them back to their cages, "from the glimmering sky the pigeons descended like a heavenly chain gang, and returned meekly to their prison. They were not free." Then, speaking in his adult voice, Gold comments on the symbolic significance of the pigeons. "We children always marvelled at this," he says, "but now the secret is known to me; pigeons, like men, are easily tamed with food" (129). At the end of the chapter, after a group of tenement residents, hearing the rooftop commotion, has prevented Louis's assault on Aunt Lena, the narrator tells that "Louis's pigeons, that he had neglected all
this time, flew down in a great whirl of wings on their coop, prisoners, like all of us, of the East Side" (140). The higher importance of the political message in the novel to its literary quality is evident here in Gold's choice to tell the meaning of the symbol instead of letting the pigeons stand as an objective correlative for the idea of the Jews held in the poverty of the East Side.

The theme of the corruption of innocence shows up repeatedly, always caused by the cash nexus, by capitalist institutions or culture. When Gold introduces his Lower East Side neighborhood in the opening chapter, the first fact on which he focuses attention is the presence of the area's many prostitutes. He says his neighborhood "was then the city's red light district, a vast 606 playground under the business management of Tammany Hall" (14). While the five-year-old Mike may not be able to identify capitalism as the real culprit in this corruption, he does know what "'business'" means concerning the whores, and through the repeated association of prostitutes and the idea of business through the following pages, the point is made: prostitution is paradigmatic of capitalist enterprise. In Chapter Two Harry the Pimp is introduced. He is the neighborhood's "pattern of American success." "He looked upon himself as a kind of philanthropic business man," the narrator says, and "there were others who regarded him the same." Harry is in fact an admirable middle-class role model: clean, well-dressed, a family man, and a promoter of America and the American Dream
to the neighborhood children—a sort of Lower East Side Jay- cee (28-29). But of course his business is corruption.

The characters who have ascended to the bourgeoisie have a common love for money and material goods that has replaced human warmth. The man Mike's father works for, Zechariah Cohen, is what Herman Gold aspires to become—"a boss painter" (212). In a chapter entitled "How to Become a Millionaire," Cohen, in the manner of the devil, induces Herman Gold's corruption by dangling before him the prospect of buying a tract house in the Borough Park section of Brooklyn. Herman spies on his fellow workers for Cohen and wins promotion to foreman when one of those on whom he has spied is fired. But when he breaks both his feet in a fall on the job, Cohen quickly forgets him and Herman forfeits the money he has paid Cohen toward the new house.

It might be expected that Herman Gold's boss would betray him in his time of need, but two of his boyhood friends from Roumania—who have also become bourgeois in America—do the same. One, Baruch Goldfarb, "the owner of a big dry goods store" and a "Tammany Hall ward politician," had already gotten Herman a "hole in the head" when he had paid him to vote in three polling places in one day and in the third Herman was blackjacked (207). Ignoring this, Herman approaches Goldfarb for a loan to open up a suspender shop as a method of rising to the bourgeoisie himself. Instead of loaning money to Herman, Goldfarb sells him a membership in the newly-formed "Baruch Goldfarb Benevolent, Sickness, Social and
Burial Society" and, like Zechariah Cohen, forgets him after his accident (209). Herman Gold's other boyhood friend is Dr. Marcus J. Axelrod, who fills his patients' expectations of a physician in dress, manner, and prescriptions. He attends Herman after his accident, but when the money runs out, so does Dr. Axelrod.

Finally there is Mr. Zunzer, the Golds' landlord. He is typically heartless and greedy and altogether a miserable fellow. Like the people who are now his tenants, Mr. Zunzer came to America very poor and grubbed for every penny he could get to bring his family over after him. But after years of this, during which three years worth of his savings were stolen, driving him to the brink of despair, Mr. Zunzer had become a slave to his money. When he finally did get his wife and children with him he was still unhappy. His story is told by Dr. Solow, who contrasts Dr. Axelrod because he treats the sick without regard to their ability to pay.

"Mr. Zunzer had formed the habit of saving money. He was a miser. He grudged his wife and children every cent they needed. He gave them little to eat. His wife fell sick; he grudged her a doctor. She died. At the funeral he fought with the undertaker over the burial price. He was always thinking of money.

"His children grew up hating him for his miserly ways. One by one they left him. The eldest boy became a thief. The second boy joined the U. S. Army. The girl disappeared.

"Mr. Zunzer was left alone. He is rich now, he owns a pawnshop and several tenement houses. But he still lives on herring and dry bread, and saves like a miser. It is a disease." (253-54)
Such characters as these represent the villains of *Jews Without Money*. They are the Jews with money, and the reader is given plainly to understand that it is the corrupting power of that money that produces in them their villainy. The novel shows virtually nothing about the individual personalities of these characters, only their common greed. Gold does not draw rounded characters in *Jews Without Money*; most are in fact caricatures: the miser landlord, the whore with the heart of gold, the kindly and idealistic doctor, and so forth. Those that are bad are clearly so; their evil is obvious from details of their physical appearance: Mr. Zunzer's "scaly yellow face and bulging eyes" (256); Mrs. Zechariah Cohen's overstuffed body, gaudy furnishings and jewelry, and headaches from overeating; Mr. Jonas Schlessel the shyster lawyer's "diamond horseshoe scarfpin" (285). Such characterizations let the reader know unequivocally Gold's attitude toward them and contribute to the simplicity of *Jews Without Money*.

The one character in the book whom the reader comes to know best and who seems to live most, despite being herself a type if not a caricature, is Mike's mother, Katie Gold. Against all the money-corrupted villains in the novel she stands for the nobility and dignity of the poor. She is the moral and spiritual center of the family home, down-to-earth and solid where her husband is emotional and flighty. The narrator says that she "had that dark proletarian instinct which distrusts all that is connected with money-making,"
so that she does not fall for the lure of Zechariah Cohen as her husband does (214). Hers is also a natural goodness, as is evident from the mushroom-hunting episode in Bronx Park in Chapter Twelve when Katie, in her true element in the freedom of the forest, finds the mushrooms by smell. She is also generous and compassionate, feeding every down-and-out, including the useless Mendel Bum, who comes to her table and even sharing with the hated Christians. "Her nature was made for universal sympathy," the narrator says, "without thought of prejudice. Her hatred of Christians was really the out-cry of a motherly soul against the boundless cruelty of life" (166). She demonstrates this sympathy by helping Betsy, an Italian woman, and Mrs. O'Brien, an Irish neighbor. Finally, Katie Gold is courageous. It is she alone who stands up to Mr. Zunzer over the issue of broken plumbing in the tenement, even when all the others who were so vociferous in their anger back down from their planned rent strike. In a paean to her, the narrator ejaculates, "I must remain faithful to the poor because I cannot be faithless to you! I believe in the poor because I have known you. The world must be made gracious for the poor! Momma, you taught me that!" (158).

The Jews without money are virtuous and the moneyed, Christians or Jews, are corrupted. The very title of the novel refers to the widespread notion that all Jews are rich. In an introduction Gold wrote for the April, 1935, printing of Jews Without Money, he tells of the experience of a German friend who was "translating a chapter" of the novel in 1933
when some of Hitler's Brown Shirts came in to arrest him and laughed at the preposterous notion of Jews without money (7). Gold goes on to express his hope that the translation of his novel into more than a dozen other languages in the five years since its original publication means that "hundreds of thousands of people have perhaps been helped to see that not all Jews are millionaire bankers" (9). He closes this introduction with a comment about his mother, "the heroine of 'Jews Without Money,' [who] died just a year ago this month."

"The life of this brave and beautiful proletarian woman," he says, "is the best answer to the fascist liars I know" (9-10). Indeed, a pure, earth-mother figure such as Katie Gold objectifies the goodness of the poor, gives the reader an appreciation of the tragedy of the corruption that has happened to so many of the immigrants, and keeps him mindful of the qualities of life that revolution will promote.

Gold's vision of the revolution is that it will make the world "gracious for the poor," and in addition to using the character of his mother to suggest the qualities that will prevail in the gracious post-revolutionary world, he uses the Jewish belief in the coming of the Messiah to convey the idea of the redemption from corruption that the revolution will bring. America is a sort of promised land to the European Jews who immigrate and populate the Lower East Side ghetto, but it corrupts them either by holding them in spiritually crippling poverty or by infecting them with the poison of filthy lucre, which makes them bourgeois. The
Messiah that will deliver the Jews from this Babylon is revolution, overcoming the power of money and the false god of individualism, sweeping away the ghetto and bourgeois America, restoring the Jews to innocence and purity, and allowing them to realize the dreams they came to America in search of but which have been so perverted—in short, making the world gracious for the poor. By using the Messiah motif, Gold is able to unite the Marxist and Jewish visions, materialism and metaphysics, and to resolve the corruption of innocence theme in revolutionary optimism.

_Jews Without Money_ presents case after case of goodness corrupted and numerous false Messiahs who have led the Jews astray. Paramount among these is the dream of individual riches, which is the lure of the capitalist system. But there is also bourgeois respectability of the sort Zecariah Cohen and Harry the Pimp attain, at the price of their decency if not their souls. And there is the American Dream that Mike's father longs to fulfill.

Other false Messiahs turn up in Chapter Fifteen, where the story of Reb Samuel the Chassid is told. Reb Samuel is another of the innocents corrupted by the capitalist culture. His innocence is evident from his physical appearance: "his face, white as Siberian snow, with beard as white, was pure and solemn as a child's" (191). One member of his congregation creates a schism by removing his beard, "because in America beards are laughed at" (196), and avoids the scriptural prohibition against cutting or trimming the beard by
using a depilatory powder. The desire for acceptance is thus one false Messiah. In order to stop the resulting dissolution of the synagogue, Reb Samuel and the other purists send to Europe for a Rabbi, who turns out to be a disappointment. A "saint and miracle worker in Europe, [he] changed in the electric air of America" (202). He "seemed to prefer the rich," or the "depilatory faction" in Reb Samuel's synagogue, and a year after his arrival he deserts for "a wealthy and un-Chassidic congregation in the Bronx" who offered him "a better-paying job" (203). Reb Samuel is broken, becoming "a tired, bewildered, lonely old Jew" (203).

It was Reb Samuel who had kindled young Mike's interest in the Messiah—which was, he says, "the one point in the Jewish religion I could understand clearly" (184)—even though Mike is not satisfied by the old man's vision of a Christ-like, loving Messiah. Mike thinks of the Messiah in terms of Buffalo Bill, a gun-toting hero who will "annihilate" the enemies of the Jews (190). The narrator recounts how he began thinking about the Messiah one day when, seeking adventure, he went into the Italian neighborhood on Mulberry Street and was routed out by a mob of Italian kids when they learned he was a Jew. Subsequently little Mike is crying in his mother's lap as she cleans his bruises and he asks "'Who is Christ?'" since the Italian kids had called him a Christ-killer" (189). His mother tells him Christ was a "false Messiah" and that the true Messiah "will save the world" when he comes and "make everything good" (189). The idea is attractive to Mike
since he wants vengeance for himself and the Jewish race. As author, Gold is here preparing the reader for the novel's revolutionarily optimistic conclusion, wherein Mike, hearing a socialist tell a crowd that "out of the despair, melancholy, and helpless rage of millions, a world movement had been born to abolish poverty," hails the "workers' Revolution" as "the true Messiah" (309). This Messiah will achieve the end of avenging injustice, not just that inflicted upon the Jews, but upon all the poor working men and women of the world. These people themselves will be the agent of vengeance, not some romantic Buffalo Bill hero-figure from a childish imagination. Coming to maturity is getting rid of one's childish illusions, yet what this true Messiah will accomplish is a sweeping away of corruption and a sort of renewal of innocence—the childlike innocence of the immigrant Jews who came to America seeking a better life. As the narrator says in his closing apostrophe to the Revolution, "You will destroy the East Side when you come, and build there a garden for the human spirit" (309).

Thus Gold links his political message with a thematic concern for the corruption of innocence, through a motif suitable to the worldview of poor immigrant Jews. This is the most "literary" aspect of Jews Without Money and lends to the novel what complexity it has. Intellectually and poetically, this concept is more complex than anything in The Disinherited, for instance, which is otherwise a more complex novel in terms of rhetorical strategy. But as a
whole, *Jews Without Money* is rhetorically the simplest of the four novels examined here, and that simplicity derives from elements of treatment likely to be more noticeable to the casual reader than the relatively subtle and complex Messiah motif. The novel's characters are mostly stereotypical and transparent, either good or bad according to the degree to which America has corrupted them. They undergo no development, and they exist more for rhetorical purposes than in their own right as individuals. Also, the narration is consistently reliable, varying only when something is shown through the eyes of Mike as a youngster, and even that is done often for the effect of shocking the audience into awareness of the brutality of ghetto life. In fact the distance is so slight between narrator and author that at times the pretense of fiction seems to be dropped altogether, and the novel seems to be more straight autobiography than fiction based on autobiography. Gold no doubt does this because of the strength of his feeling for his subject. The intensity which is undeniably present in *Jews Without Money* lies not so much in the impression of realism that the novel provides as in Gold's personal feelings. His narrative strategy allows him to communicate those feelings in their intensity in a way that the more conventional modern narrative technique of authorial self-effacement would not. At the same time, the descriptions of Lower East Side life and the renditions of Yiddish dialect which fill the novel are no doubt authentic, and authenticity is a contributor to realism. To cite
just one example, in Chapter Ten, Mike's father takes him to a local wine cellar one evening. Gold explains that in the Jewish immigrant community "wine-drinking was either religious or social. There were dozens of Russian and Roumanian wine cellars on the East Side. They were crowded with family parties after the day's work. People talked, laughed, drank wine, listened to music" (114). He goes on painting the scene, and a few paragraphs may suffice to illustrate the authenticity of the novel's air.

We sat amiably around our jug of wine, eating from a dish of nuts, pretzels, raisins and pickles. I drank a little wine and uttered words of wisdom.

"Pop, I like this place," I said.
My father chuckled with pride.
"Is he smart?" he asked his friends, stooping over and kissing me, so that I smelled the wine and tobacco on his mustache. "Is this boy smart, or no?" They nodded their heads solemnly, as if I were a genius.
"He will be at least a millionaire," said Mottke Blinder, smiling his broad, gentle, foolish smile that traveled from ear to ear. He was a vestmaker who was nicknamed the Blind One because he was so cross-eyed.
"No," said my father, "my Mechel must become a doctor. I will make the money for him. Learning is more precious than wealth; so it stands in the Talmud, Mottke."
"I agree with you," said Mottke, hastily, smiling again all over his gentle gargoyl'e's face. "Of course, Herman, but why can't he be a millionaire, too, maybe?"
I could not take my eyes off the gleaming bald head of Moscovitz, the musician.
"Pop, what song is he playing now?" I asked.
"Don't you know?" my father asked in real surprise.
"No."
"Yi! yi! yi!" my father signed, sentimentally. "I see, Mechel, you have really become an American. That is the song, Mechel,
the shepherds play on their flutes in
Roumania when they are watching the sheep.
It is a doina. How many summer days have
I heard it in the fields!"... We drank wine, we cracked the walnuts
between our jaws, we ate pickles and talked;
talked, talked. Moscowitz played the sweet
gypsy dulcimer, and a hundred Jews in derby
hats filled the basement with smoke and
laughter. (116-120)

Passages such as this one do indeed create an impression
of realism in Jews Without Money. But the chapter in which
this passage appears is one of the few in which the narration
is limited to the child's point of view. The frequent intru­
sions of the older and wiser voice of the adult Mike Gold
damage the reader's illusion that he is seeing the presented
scenes for himself. For instance, in Chapter Three, Gold
describes some of the summer play habits of his childhood
days, but he cannot resist making the gratuitous political
comment, pointing a class moral that the young Mike whom he
shows experiencing the described activity is unequipped to
do. "We turned on the fire hydrant in summer," Gold says,
"and splashed in the street, shoes, clothes and all. Or
went swimming from the docks" on the East River.

The sun was shining, the tugboats passed,
puffing like bulldogs, the freight boats
passed, their pale stokers hanging over
the rails, looking at us, the river flowed
and glittered, the sky was blue, it was all
good. ... We were naked, free, and coo­
coo with younness. Anything done in the
sun is good. The sun, the jolly old sun
who is every one's poppa, looked down as
affectionately on his little riffraff Yids
as he did on his syphilitic millionaires
at Palm Beach, I am sure. (39-40)
Intrusive comments such as these in the voice of a reliable narrator so closely identified with the book's real-life author communicate the intensity of Mike Gold's personal feelings about his childhood experiences from the point of view of his subsequent political awareness. The reliable narrator assures the reader that what is described really "happened, . . . [was] part of our daily lives, not lurid articles in a Sunday newspaper" (35). But such comments tend to damage the illusion of fictional realism in Jews Without Money, and they indicate the centrality, for Gold, of the novel's political message.

The Disinherited

A significant step above Jews Without Money in complexity is Jack Conroy's The Disinherited, often called the "classic" Proletarian novel. It is similar to Gold's book in that the author's own experiences form the basis for the narrative, but it differs sharply in that it is wholly a fictionalized treatment of those experiences, whereas Jews Without Money is more nearly a proto-novel. In The Disinherited we see the treatment of the Marxist vision in the hands of a crude but fundamentally competent fictionist. For Mike Gold, Proletarian literature was "the tenement pouring out its soul through . . . its most articulate sons and daughters," and the Proletarian writer did not have to "worry too much about form" as long as he was in touch with and accurately
reported the life of the tenement. Conroy, on the other hand, obviously applies literary form to proletarian materials, albeit rather crudely. Certainly the content is more important than the form in *The Disinherited*; Conroy seems to be working in the context of V. F. Calverton's contention that in the Proletarian novel "literary craftsmanship [alone] is not enough. It must be utilized to create objects of revolutionary meaning." He seems also to be working in the tradition of the simultaneously entertaining and instructing literary artist, first articulated by Sir Philip Sidney in "An Apology for Poetry." *The Disinherited* is a radical bildungsroman: the growth to maturity—physical, spiritual, and, most importantly, political—of a proletarian hero, Larry Donovan, the youngest of three sons of a Missouri coal-mining family, illustrates the class struggle. Larry has various work experiences as he travels the road to class-consciousness. The novel is divided into three numbered parts, entitled respectively "Monkey Nest Camp," "Bull Market," and "The Hard Winter." These parts equate roughly with three stages of Larry Donovan's life. Part One describes his childhood in the Monkey Nest mining camp and establishes sympathy for his parents and for the oppressed miners, representative of the working class in general. Part Two recounts Larry's

14 The first quote is from "Towards Proletarian Art," *Liberator*, 4 (February, 1921), 21, the second from "Notes of the Month," *New Masses*, 5 (January, 1930), 7.

experiences over the years from World War I until the height of the Bull Market in the late 1920's. In this section he leaves home to strike out on his own in the world of labor, full of expectations of an Alger-type rise in fortune. As he works at a series of jobs in such places as a railroad car repair shop, a steel mill, a rubber heel plant, and an automobile assembly plant, Larry meets numerous characters from the working class and the bourgeoisie, and he gradually learns for himself the hardship of the working man's lot in a capitalist economy as his dreams of individualistic success become tarnished. Part Three covers two years dating from the stock market Crash of 1929, wherein Larry experiences the ravages of Depression unemployment and underemployment before returning to the Monkey Nest district where he finally comes to class-consciousness and takes some implicitly revolutionary action in the light of his new awareness. The novel closes with Larry in the first flush of success at this kind of action joining up with a radical organizer and setting off once again, this time with a living sense of class solidarity and a social rather than individual purpose. This is the typical conversion novel pattern. Larry travels from a poor but happy and value-nurturing childhood through the moral no-man's-land of the laboring world, where he learns the vanity of his naive and hopeful expectations of self-improvement and nearly succumbs to the moral turpitude that characterizes capitalist society. He ascends from these depths with his long-held faith in working people intact, however, and his
story ends with Larry reaching new heights of spiritual fulfillment through his assumption of revolutionary proletarian consciousness. Furthermore, Conroy lends human interest to his radical Pilgrim's Progress by paralleling Larry's growth to political maturity with his assumption of his father's legacy of manhood and heroic leadership. The bildungsroman pattern, shaded in with this human interest element, carries the burden of communicating the political message in The Disinherited. The reader is educated also as he accompanies Larry on his journey, educated more exclusively by the devices of fiction than in Jews Without Money.

The most important difference in treatment in The Disinherited is Conroy's effacement from the novel. Larry's story is narrated by Larry himself; Conroy makes no direct comments on that story. Since Conroy's voice is not present the way Gold's is in Jews Without Money, he must rely on other means to convey his values. As Booth says, an author "cannot choose to avoid rhetoric; he can only choose the kind of rhetoric he will employ." To insure the reader's sympathy for Larry, the novel's hero, Conroy first of all makes him the narrator. As Booth says, "traveling with a narrator who is unaccompanied by a helpful author" decreases the emotional distance between reader and narrator, making the narrator extremely sympathetic if he is "so close . . . to the norms of the work that no complicated deciphering of unreliability is

16 The Rhetoric of Fiction, p. 149.
required of the reader." That Larry is this close to Conroy's norms is evident from the political position at which he arrives in Part Three of the novel, but it is also evident from the kind of person he shows himself to be in Part One.

In the opening section of the novel, the reader sees Larry as a child of normally active and playful imagination, talking to doodle bugs in their holes in the ground, imagining heroes and villains in battle in the woods near his house, delighting in the comic strips in Indianapolis News and in the tales of Robin Hood and Macaulay's poetry. He sees him snubbed for his status as "'camp trash'" by a local farmer's daughter (16). He sees him suffer the pitfalls of childish error in one incident where he accidently stains "a hideous saffron" a load of laundry his mother is doing for the local butcher's wife (68-69). All of these things show Larry to be a normal growing boy. Larry grows up in a home where, poor though it is, solid American values are taught. Larry's father expresses the conventional hope of American parents that his son will have a better life than he has had, and he shows his willingness to sacrifice to insure a better future for his son. Tom Donovan hopes that Larry can escape the

17 ibid., p. 274.

mines that have held him and his two older sons in thrall and rise in the world to become "a lawyer or a doctor" (12). He undertakes the dangerous but higher-paying "shot firing" job in the Monkey Nest mine in order to raise the money "to send Larry to school in town" (47). Sympathy for Larry thus comes through the kind of home in which he is raised in addition to the kind of person he is. In the absence of reliable authorial commentary, some other device is necessary to allow the reader to measure Larry's growth in the course of the novel. Therefore Conroy yokes Larry's gaining of class-consciousness to his becoming worthy of his father's name.

To prepare the way for this, he establishes Tom Donovan as worthy in the opening section. His sacrifice for his son's welfare by taking the shot-firing job accomplishes his worthiness, and his stature is elevated to near-martrydom when he dies in the mine, not only because of his sacrifice for Larry in taking the job in the first place, but also because he loses his life trying to save a crippled comrade, peg-legged Mike Riordan.

However, Tom Donovan is admirable even before his final sacrifice. He is big, handsome, intelligent (a college graduate), sensitive (he had been a priest in Canada before becoming disillusioned with the Church), proud, and a charismatic leader of men. "It didn't take him long to win leadership of the miners' local union--or rather he had it thrust upon him. When he spoke in lodge he used a deep rolling voice so much different from his ordinary tone that we called
it his 'meeting' voice" (17). Before his death, Tom Donovan is shown in his role as union leader during a mine strike. Mr. Stacpoole, the mine owner, tries to get Donovan to call an end to the strike by bribing him with the pit boss job. But Donovan maintains his dignity and refuses even though his family is hungry and his credit with the grocer no longer good. His temper does flare, however, at the appearance of a strikebreaker at his door one night. He lays the man out with one punch and sends him flying before a shotgun blast, then he cries passionately to Larry and his brother Tim, "Be a thief, a murderer, anything, but don't ever be a scab!" (33).

All of these details present Tom Donovan in two respects essential to the novel's theme: as a strong and heroic father and as a champion of the working man. Both as a man and as a proletarian hero, Tom Donovan is a role model for Larry, and Larry's journey through the rest of the novel will prepare him for filling his father's shoes in both respects, a factor which attracts the reader's human interest while educating him politically.

After the death of Larry's father, his mother's admirable qualities come to the fore, further cementing reader support for these people. She sacrifices by taking in washing and struggles to keep what is left of her family together. She also demonstrates strength of character through her belief in her late husband's principles regarding the dignity of the working man as she refuses a paying job cooking for and feeding
strikebreakers in a subsequent miners' strike. In fact she moves out of her home rather than submit to the landlord's economic bribery when he suggests the only way it would pay him to let her stay is for her to board the strikebreakers, since the mine superintendent has offered him twice the rent Mrs. Donovan is paying for the house. Thus, in much the same fashion as in Jews Without Money (though without the dramatic apostrophes to Momma), The Disinherited establishes the connection between the human interest in mother love and the political interest of support for the proletariat.

Many of the details that establish admiration for Larry's father and mother also contribute to an appreciation of the hardships of the working poor as a result of the class system. In this way, Conroy widens reader sympathy to the class that Larry represents. He does not resort to the kind of special pleading that Mike Gold employs in Jews Without Money, nor does he present blatantly shocking details. Instead he imparts a feeling for the injustices done to the miners and their families by including evidence of such injustices in Larry's account of his childhood days in Monkey Nest Camp. The strike that Larry's father leads is in response to a wage cut by the mine owner, and the typical owner's tactic in the strike is to rely on time and poverty to starve the miners into submission. The heartlessness of such an attitude is magnified by the contrast in living conditions between capital and labor evident in one brief episode early in the novel. Larry has been describing the children's chore of scavenging coal spilled during
the process of loading railroad cars from the tipple, during which "coal dust foul[ed] the air like a thunder cloud, [and the children] spat black for hours" (22). Juxtaposed with this summary is a scene in which Mr. Stacpoole and his family drive up in the first motor-car to be seen in the camp. As Mrs. Stacpoole descends from the car, Larry catches "a glimpse of elaborately frilled garter," the first of these he has ever seen because "coal miners' wives and daughters held up their stockings with rags" (23). Stacpoole's "little Lord Fauntleroy" son pushes Larry's younger sister into a mud puddle, jeering, "'Coal miner's brat! Coal miner's brat! Catch and eat a rat, eat lean and eat fat!''" (23). His mother is only "mildly re­­proving" (24).

Elsewhere in this section, there is evidence of injustice in the form of the triumph of money values over human values on the part of even average people, not just the owning class. Whereas Jews Without Money presents bourgeois characters as villains corrupted by filthy lucre, Part One of The Disinherited presents them as less caricaturistic. The simple reality of the economic system forces people like Phelps the grocer, Koch the butcher, and Fred Dodson the landlord--each with enough touch of humanity to escape the flatness of Gold's characters--to assert money values over human needs; in each case someone to whom he owes fealty requires such a stand. The indictment of the system is suggested rather than stated, but it is nonetheless plain.

With the preparation thus accomplished in Part One of the
novel, Conroy can now send the reader off with Larry as he ventures into the world of work at the age of thirteen. The narration of Larry's journey to conversion is episodic. Part Two shows him in various work situations, for the most part, and as in *Jews Without Money*, little is revealed about the psychological process of conversion. A sense of progress toward that end is present, however, and it can be marked out in definite steps.

The first occurs before Larry leaves home and some time after his father's death when a simple-minded Negro strike-breaker, beaten for a scab, begs a meal from Larry's mother. The man is astonished at the accusation of scabbing and tells how he was recruited from Mobile, Alabama, to work in Missouri and that he had no idea he was harming anybody. Larry comments, "I had always regarded a scab as a sub-human beast endowed with an inherent vileness. I had never before regarded a scab as a puppet manipulated by those who stood to gain the most, but who never braved the wrath of the strikers" (61-62). Early in Part Two Larry is involved in his first sexual experience, with a girl named Wilma at his boarding house in Marlton, when a newsboy in the street below shouts the headlines telling of the United States' declaration of war in 1917. Larry reacts with hatred and disgust for Wilma as he thinks of "the women of Russia fighting in the trenches" while she pursues the pleasures of the flesh (94). What is happening here is not so much the kindling of an identification between Larry and the Russian peasantry as the assertion of his altruism
against selfishness, a prerequisite to revolutionary awareness. Soon thereafter Larry witnesses the beating of a radical anti-war agitator by a mob, and he bursts into tears in sympathy at the man's plight. He soon decides that "everything about the war [is] cruel," saying, "Behind the Liberty Loan posters, I saw the agitator's bloody, tragic face" (99). However, his reaction this time is to "retreat into [him]self, shut out the world," and pursue his own individual destiny (99-100).

The next episode involves a strike in the railroad shop where Larry works. The strike is eventually (and inevitably) broken, and so is the spirit of Larry's friend Rollie Weems, who alone of the striking shopmen refuses to acknowledge the fact of the broken strike and, futilely sticking to his principles in isolation, prefers to starve than taint himself by any association with scabs. This stand eventually results in Rollie's death, and since he was married to Larry's Aunt Jessie, Larry attempts to collect for her on Rollie's union life insurance policy. He is unsuccessful, and the uncaring and self-satisfied attitude of the union's District President angers Larry as he thinks about the sacrifices made by the strikers in comparison to the selfishness of the bourgeois union officials (125).

Larry's next work experience is in a steel mill, and it is here that he encounters his first "Red" and feels his first thrill of combativeness against the bosses. The work in the mill is dangerous and clearly dehumanizing, although
Larry makes no direct comments to this effect. When the company institutes a fifteen per cent pay cut, it enrages Lipkin, the "Red," who lashes out at yet another collusive and kow-towing union official and smashes the factory's time clock, the symbol of the regulation of the workers' lives. As a company guard knocks Lipkin down with a blow from a club, Larry says that "something sang in my blood" and he leaps to Lipkin's defense, is clubbed himself, and fired with Lipkin from the mill (151). Despite this first act of proletarian courage, however, Larry persists at this point in his individualistic illusion of rising to the bourgeois by completing correspondence courses in accounting. He has yet to put together instincts and consciousness.

He does not make this connection throughout the remainder of Part Two of the novel, even though he moves into an even more debilitating job at the odious Rubber Heel Plant, and from there into dehumanizing assembly line labor at an automobile assembly plant in Detroit. He meets another radical, Hans, who urges him to "Read Marx" (178), and he becomes friendly with Bonny Fern Haskins, the farmer's daughter on whom Larry has had a crush since childhood and who has since moved with her father to Detroit in search of a college education and a better living. Bonny Fern tries to interest Larry in a magazine called "The New Proletariat" (obviously New Masses) and to stimulate him about radical politics (202-03). Larry is beginning to wake up to political and economic reality--he realizes the fallacy of his dreams of self-improvement
from the things he has seen while working—and he enjoys discussing revolutionary topics with Bonny Fern, but his general orientation is still toward self. It is not until after the Crash and his return to Missouri in Part Three that Larry's class-consciousness blossoms.

After the stock market Crash of 1929, Larry, like much of the American labor force, has to scrimp his way through the "Hard Winter" of 1929-30. In the early chapters of Part Three, he recounts his experiences with job hunting, breadlines, and flophouses. His political awareness is stirring, but he gets no external endorsement of his feelings to galvanize them into full class-consciousness. For one thing his cynical and more experienced—and apparently wiser—friend Ed Warden is a wet blanket over Larry's belief in the courage and spunk of the workers. When Ben and Bonny Fern Haskins propose to return to the farm and Ben suggests Larry and Ed go along, Larry declines, saying, "'There's going to be something doing in the cities. Men won't starve quietly in the world's richest country.'" To this Ed snorts "derisively, 'You've been listenin' to them soapboxers again'" (227). At this point Larry has only an abstract revolutionary understanding of the situation; he does not yet have an active conviction. After they have survived the winter, and spring is in the air, Ed proposes they go home to Missouri, but Larry wants to stay, citing the newly-organized "block committees to resist eviction" as evidence that "'they're stirring here.'" Again Ed derides such activism, here speaking
as the voice of common sense when Larry tries to argue radical political theory: "'In another minute you'll be shootin' them fifty-cent words at me. Talk United States if you want me to get hep to what you're drivin' at. That's why them soap-boxers never get anywhere. Why don't they talk about beans and potatoes, lard and bacon instead of "ideology," "agrarian crisis" and "rationalization"?" (239). Ed is here the proletarian reader's friend in expressing a preference for specifics to theory. Larry's radicalism is still abstract and intellectual; his whole self is not yet engaged on behalf of the proletariat.

However, Larry is soon forced to return home when news comes from Bonny Fern that his mother is destitute and squatting with Aunt Jessie and her three children in one of the deserted buildings at the now-abandoned Monkey Nest Camp. Larry and Ed find work on a pipeline-laying crew to get them through the rest of the year and shore up Larry's mother's existence. But with the onset of winter, the pipeline work is over and Larry and his "family" are poverty-stricken and hungry once again. It is at this point, when Larry is complaining about the generally miserable economic conditions, that his mother invokes the memory of Tom Donovan to try to stir Larry out of his lethargy, and at this point that the novel begins to move toward its climax as the various thematic threads are brought together. Larry is to fill his father's shoes. The local farmers are directionless and ungalvanized, his mother tells him; they need an organizer, "'a fighter,'"
someone who can "'straighten things out'" like Larry's father always knew how to do (281). The truth of this need and the sense of his calling come home to Larry as he works laying bricks for a highway roadbed the following summer. Our anger and his consciousness are roused simultaneously by the supercilious conversation of some snobbish bourgeois shopkeepers, sitting in the shade of their shops and in the breeze of their electric fans while Larry and the paving gang swelter in the sun. Larry finally repudiates the last remnants of his individualistic illusions and affirms his solidarity with the working class.

I no longer felt shame at being seen at such work as I would have once, and I knew that the only way for me to rise to something approximating the grandiose ambitions of my youth would be to rise with my class, with the disinherited: the bricksetters, the flivver tramps, boomers and outcasts pounding their ears in flophouses. Every gibe at any of the paving gang, every covert or open sneer by prosperous looking bystanders infuriated me but did not abash me. The fat on my bones melted away under the glare of the burnished sun, and the fat in my mind dissolved, too. It dripped in sweat off the end of my nose onto the bricks, dampened the sand. . . . I felt like a man whose feet have been splashing about in ooze and at last have come to rest on a solid rock, even though it lay far below his former level. (286)

Larry's first class-conscious political act follows shortly thereafter when by his example he unites his fellow workers on behalf of an old Negro laborer, "Steamboat" Mose, who has collapsed from heat exhaustion. When the foreman virtually ignores old Mose and starts to put the gang back
to work, Larry announces for all to hear, "'I don't lay another brick till you get a doctor for him'" (293). Ed joins in Larry's demand and so do others, until the foreman gives in and fetches a doctor.

From here the novel moves quickly to its revolutionarily optimistic climactic scene wherein Larry accepts his calling and begins his future as an organizer with the Bolshevik Hans, who has reappeared just at the moment when Larry is realizing his solidarity with the disinherited. Hans has organized the local farmers into subverting the sheriff's sale of Ben Haskins' farm, and Larry enlists the aid of some unemployed men in town and leads them out to the farm. The farm is purchased at auction for fifty cents, and the sheriff and his deputies are overcome by the massed crowd and driven away. As the farmers rally together with impromptu speeches, Larry says that "some vital force flowed from them as they talked." When Larry himself gets up to speak he finds himself "enkindled by the response of the crowd" so that he thinks "I must have inherited some of my father's gift." That Larry has indeed achieved his full inheritance is evident from the remarks of a "weather-beaten veteran" who tells him his speech was "'the best talk we've had in these parts since Tom Donovan usta be alive'" (307). Larry then tells Hans that he is going with him and they ride off, together with Ed Warden and Nat Moore, Larry's old Rubber Heel Plant comrade, and his family, "headed west" to do more organizing (309).
Thus it is that Conroy combines and parallels the themes of a working-class hero honoring the memory of his father as he grows to maturity and of the conversion of a working-class hero from potential to realized class-consciousness. At the same time Larry, as a simultaneously typical and individuated character, shows the audience the way to class-consciousness of its own. To the extent that the reader identifies with Larry, he participates in Larry's conversion; he does not merely witness it. But Conroy has taken additional measures to insure the reader's approbation of what happens to Larry in the course of the novel. One of these is to provide various of what Booth calls "disguised narrators" who reliably communicate the norms of the work while seeming merely to act out their roles in the narrative.\(^\text{19}\) Both Larry's father and mother fill this function inasmuch as they gain the reader's unqualified admiration from the beginning of the novel. Another such character is the radical Hans, whom Larry meets when he goes to work in the Rubber Heel Plant and with whom he joins up upon his conversion. The latter fact of course demonstrates Conroy's support of Hans, and Mrs. Donovan's comparison of Hans to Larry's father late in the novel insures reader approval of him (289). But Hans' reliability is evident much earlier, on his first appearance in the novel, when he is distinguished by his "meticulously chosen speech," his erudition regarding a coin discovered in

\(^{19}\) The Rhetoric of Fiction, p. 152.
a rubber bale (158), and his moral superiority—he does not laugh at the rubber workers' sexual jokes (170). The reason for Hans' disgust at Jasper Collins' pornographic humor is soon evident: the sexes are equal in the revolution, Hans reveals; one does not regard women as sex objects when one has seen them fighting and dying on the barricades (171).

Hans is the first character Larry has become involved with in the course of his experiences in the working world who practices moral discipline, who believes in anything higher than immediate gratification and self-satisfaction, and thus he stands above the Rollie Weemses, the Ed Wardens, the Nat Moores, and especially the Jasper Collinses, who, as Hans says, may be found "'everywhere'" (171).

Also, the book is populated by characters whose experience with the world contrasts with Larry's naivete. Larry gradually comes to realize that union leaders are often corrupt and collusive with the bosses, that strikes are often doomed to fail because of strikers who sell out their comrades, and most of all that individualistic dreams of self-improvement are phony, but the experienced hands that he meets along the way convince the reader of these things before Larry sees the light. The reader's education proceeds at a slightly faster pace than Larry's because these reliable informants keep the reader closer to Conroy's norms than Larry is until his conversion.

One such informant is a hobo Larry meets on his freight train journey to Detroit. In a fit of lonesomeness, Larry tells the man of his ambitions to rise in the world through education
and the bum, himself a college graduate, tells Larry to "'Forget it. . . . There ain't any more Alger heroes now'" (182). The reader has seen enough to recognize the truth in the man's words, but Larry persists in his conventional dream until much later.

*The Disinherited* does not contain a great deal of imagery or symbolism to provide a key to its meaning; the message is direct enough that it does not require the aid of these devices to communicate it. However, Conroy does use it occasionally as an indicator of his values in the face of Larry's relative unawareness. The novel opens, for instance, with Larry's description of the Monkey Nest mine's dirt dump in symbolic language that vaguely sets the political tone. "The dump dominated Monkey Nest camp like an Old World cathedral towering over peasants huts," Larry says (9). Such language suggests to the average modern reader the most backward time in history--the Dark Ages--when men were held in thrall and governed by superstition and unenlightened feudal masters. Even apolitical readers would surely recognize that men need liberation from serfdom, so the image disposes the audience to side with the modern serfs--the working class. The same image is repeated in Part Two when Larry describes his work in the steel mill. Speaking of a "huge overhead crane" that operates in the mill, Larry describes how "at intervals [it] travelled to the extreme end of the building, which opened up as two great doors," and he says the "mill hands gathered around these massive portals and pushed like medieval serfs throwing wide the gates of a feudal castle" (130).
Late in the novel, when Larry and Ed are working on the pipeline job after their return to Missouri from Detroit, Conroy employs a metaphor which communicates the illusory nature of the pie-in-the-sky myth with which the bosses exploit labor. The pipeline is going through a valley where the digging is made especially tough by the muddy clay. The superintendent of the job tries to rally the ditch-diggers by pointing out to them "the misty ridges" of some hills in the distance. "'Yon's the High Ground, bullies,' he would say cheerfully. 'Up there in the High Ground they's a dandy soil that don't stick like this gumbo'" (274). A couple of days later Ed learns that "'That High Ground business is just a fake'" because another crew has been digging from the other direction and they are "'about to the top of the hill a'ready'" (278).

Finally, toward the end of Part Two of the novel, when Larry reaches his moral low ebb after causing a ruckus in a whorehouse and subsequently passing out drunk from guzzling Nat Moore's home-brewed beer in a fit of self-destructiveness, the relation of his state to history is revealed through the device of his reading newspaper headlines. This is a popular technique in the Proletarian novel, for it enables the author to make an ironic comment without directly intruding upon his narrative. In this case, the comment is that American capitalist culture is flourishing outwardly and rotting within with the corruption of money. Larry has come to a similar point. He seems to be well-off because he is employed and in the boom industry--automobiles--but he is really unsatisfied. As he
wanders hungover into a small square, he sees "yesterday's newspapers, yellowed by the sun and fouled with grime and sputum, flutter . . . around the square." "Bold, black headlines stabbed at my bleary eyes," he says. They read "'Wealthy Realtor's Love Letters Read in Crowded Courtroom'"; "'Poverty will be Abolished, Says Hoover'"; "'Stocks in Meteoric Rise; Permanent Plateau Reached'" (214). The sordid tale of the wealthy realtor's love letters reveals the underlying corruption at the height of the boom, and because of this and Larry's condition, the reader appreciates the irony of the title of Part Two, "Bull Market."

The fairest generalization about the realism and intensity of *The Disinherited* seems to be that the novel is uneven. Although it has in common with *Jews Without Money* a factual basis in the author's personal experience, *The Disinherited* communicates little of the intensity of Conroy's feeling when it is compared to Gold's book. Certainly it is more difficult for a writer to reveal the strength of his personal feeling if he removes his own voice from what he has written than if he speaks directly to the reader, but James T. Farrell's *Studs Lonigan*, discussed below, features an effaced author yet is much more intense than *The Disinherited*. On the other hand, *The Disinherited* is a more realistic piece of fiction than *Jews Without Money* because Conroy chooses to keep himself out of the narrative, whereas Gold intrudes upon his. The silent author makes for a more intense illusion of reality as a reader proceeds through a novel, but that silence alone does
not guarantee such an impression is evident from *The Disinherited*. Other devices are needed, and here again *The Disinherited* is uneven. Some characters are vivid—old Bun Grady, for instance, when Larry first meets him hiring on at the steel mill, and the lecherous Jasper Collins. But Larry himself lacks the psychological depth necessary to be fully believable as a human being. He seems strangely passive as he experiences the various shocks and outrages that fill the laborer's world, and he tells very little about his personal feelings regarding many things about which the reader may well be curious. For instance, in Part Three Larry heads back to Monkey Nest camp after receiving news from Bonny Fern that his mother is destitute and living with his Aunt Jessie and her three children in a leaky abandoned camp house. The journey back to Monkey Nest from Detroit is long and full of annoyances to Larry and Ed because of their poverty, and Larry has been away from his mother for about fifteen years. The love he expressed for her in Part One and which he presumably still feels is nowhere apparent when he finally finds her and the others "'living in the old barroom'" at Monkey Nest camp (254). The tearful reunion scene one might expect with hugging and kissing and complaints about hard times does not materialize, and Larry refers to his feelings only indirectly. Instead he describes the appearance of the old barroom and his memories of how he had yearned to get in as a boy. He says he "looked closely at Mother and Aunt Jessie," but it seems as if he is scrutinizing them from across the
room to avoid their notice of what he is doing (254). There is no mention of any embraces. "Aunt Jessie," Larry says, "greeted us with a forlorn and toothless grin," and the reader is left to wonder why she says nothing and makes no more expressive a gesture (255). The conversation that does occur is absurdly perfunctory. The only thing Larry's mother says is "'Are you hungry, boys?'" (255).

In contrast to such emotional lifelessness, the novel is realistic in its depictions of working conditions in the many jobs which Larry holds through Parts Two and Three and in its descriptions of coal mine operations in Part One. All of these are filled with the kind of technical detail that establishes the authenticity of Conroy's pictures. Passages of this sort are numerous in the novel; every time Larry goes to work on a new job he describes some industrial or laboring process. The citation of one such description will serve as an example. Describing work in the Rubber Heel Plant Larry says,

The rubber mills are two huge, hollow steel cylinders which revolve so that the materials are caught between them and fused into the amalgam from which the raw heels are cut. But before the mass adheres to the cylinder and the powders are assimilated by the rubber, paraffin and stearic acid, the stuff drops to the pan beneath and must be constantly shoveled above. A prismatic cloud from the many-hued powders harries nostrils and eyes. The mixture cracks terrifically. When the rubber begins to stick, the short knife is used to slice it away and keep
It is feeding through till all of it has been thoroughly blended. The supreme test for the miller is to slice the rubber off the mill in a constantly widening strip with one hand and to roll it into a "jelly roll" with the other. The miller who can roll a huge jelly roll of half a mill full is considered expert. (164-65)

It is on realism of character and action, however, that the effectiveness of the novel's theme depends, not on realism of technical detail, which merely adds verisimilitude to those other elements rather than supplying it. Despite such problems with realism, however, The Disinherited remains a more "literary" work than Jews Without Money in that it communicates its political message substantially through literary devices and arouses the audience's literary as well as its political interests. It is, therefore, a more complex work than Gold's book, although as sophisticated literature it remains fairly elementary.

The Land of Plenty

Ranking higher on the simple-to-complex scale is Robert Cantwell's 1934 novel The Land of Plenty. Cantwell, a previously-published novelist, was a more polished literary craftsman than Jack Conroy. He had been, in fact, a student of Henry James. While he frankly named The Land of Plenty "a work of propaganda," a reading of the novel reveals that
the propaganda is communicated through the affecting power of relatively sophisticated literary techniques.  

The Land of Plenty deals with the class struggle by taking its subject the events leading up to a spontaneous strike at a plywood veneer mill in the Pacific Northwest. Such a subject lends itself aptly to novelistic treatment, as Rideout observes, because "a strike . . . possesses a basic rhythm"--rising to a sudden climax, then falling--like "that which underlies any piece of literature." There are two major themes in the novel. Part One, "Power and Light," treats the workers' struggle for power against the managerial elite, an objectification of the class struggle on a more or less general level; Part Two, "The Education of a Worker," focuses more particularly on a young worker's developing class-consciousness as the strike materializes.

In this latter respect, The Land of Plenty bears a resemblance to The Disinherited, but it is only a superficial one. The perspective from which the audience views the awakening political consciousness of Johnny Hagen--indeed, its perspective on all the action--in Cantwell's book makes for a qualitatively different aesthetic experience than that received from Larry Donovan's first-person account in Conroy's novel. The Land of Plenty shows the influence of Flaubertian

Cantwell had previously published Laugh and Lie Down in 1931. His remark about The Land of Plenty appears in "Authors' Field Day: A Symposium on Marxist Criticism," New Masses, 3 July 1934, p. 27.

The Radical Novel in the United States, p. 172.
aesthetics: the author is apparently entirely removed from his creation. It is true that Conroy in The Disinherited maintains some distance between his audience and his narrator as part of his narrative strategy, but such distance is more rigorously and consciously—indeed artificially—controlled by Cantwell in The Land of Plenty. The obvious intention of Cantwell's technical approach is to let his audience "see" the action "objectively" in order that it may judge the characters involved in it and infer the meaning of what goes on. Rhetorically, such a method makes for effective argument since it permits the reader the conviction of his own conclusions drawn from the presented evidence. However, as any good rhetorician knows, to be effective in the indirect approach, a writer must carefully control the reader's inferences without appearing to do so. In The Land of Plenty Robert Cantwell uses modern literary means—primarily dramatic showing, as opposed to reliable telling—to make his propagandistic case.

The outstanding feature of the treatment of the subject in The Land of Plenty, with respect to rhetorical method, is the narrative strategy. Of the novels discussed thus far, The Land of Plenty is easily the most successful in achieving those desiderata of the Proletarian novel, realism and intensity. It does this by virtue of dramatic showing instead of narrative telling. There is no dramatized narrator in The Land of Plenty: instead there is an omniscient narrator who shifts the point of view from character to character. Thus the reader sees inside
the heads of no fewer than seven of the characters in the novel. The numbered chapters within each section are titled with characters' names, and usually each chapter relates events from that character's point of view, although Chapters Five, "The Light Man," and Eleven, "Ellen," of Part Two violate this general principle. Occasionally the point of view shifts within a chapter, as for instance in Part One, Chapter Two, "Hagen," when the reader is given a brief glimpse of Winters' private thoughts. Such a technique frees the narrative from adherence to chronological time and grants the reader sufficient aesthetic distance from the characters to compare their different responses to the same events. Such perspective allows the reader to see for himself that the bourgeois characters--especially Carl, the plant's night shift foreman, and MacMahon, its superintendent--are blind to what is really happening in the plant all through Part One, while the workers--Hagen and Winters, for instance--recognize it. The effect is to give the novel an air of overall "objectiveness," which heightens both the impression of realism and the convincingness of the implied argument.

The characters are divided into management and labor groups. The relation of each to reality is established in the first two chapters, which present the reactions of the

primary representatives of each group to the power failure that hits the plant on the night of July 3, 1929, as the shift is working on a crucial rush order of doors for export to Australia. The first chapter introduces Carl and the second Hagen, and together they afford a contrast between Carl's almost-whimpering helplessness, his paranoid suspicion, his meanness and pettiness, his professional incompetence, and his egregious lack of common sense on the one hand, and Hagen's cool competence and professionalism on the other. The order in which Carl and Hagen are presented contributes to a feeling of objectivity. It is only after the reader sees Hagen's common-sense analysis of the power failure problem that he can fully recognize Carl's foolishness. Cantwell's judgment is discernible only inferentially, and it does not emerge until the second chapter is underway, so the reader does not prejudge Carl. The reader is told that Hagen "raced through the dark factory to his shop. There he grabbed a flashlight and ran outside to the fireroom. It was on another circuit and if it was dark too, he'd be sure it was a break outside the factory" (40). This bit of factual information reveals the drollery of Carl's thesis that the blackout is the result of a blown out "fuse plug" (22). Carl's persistence in this fantasy and in believing that the blackout is somehow Hagen's fault establishes the pattern of management's self-delusion and hypocrisy that is essential to the novel's theme. Such insights into the thoughts of characters in both sides in the struggle provide "objective" comparisons
which enable the reader to know the bourgeois characters better than they know themselves. Irony of this kind is possible only when the author is removed from the narrative and not disguised in the person of a reliable narrator.  

As Part One develops, Carl reveals himself more and more to be a fool, worthy of the reader's contempt for his foolishness, his egotism, his ineptitude, and for the injustice of his having authority over workers ennobled by competence and conscientiousness, qualities which are unsolicited and unrecognized by management. In this way both Carl and MacMahon are thoroughly discredited. Their folly culminates in Chapter Seven when the two of them get lost beneath the factory and wander directionlessly out onto the surrounding tideflat and away from the factory while Carl, attempting to save face with his boss, pretends to know where he is going. When they are most lost they lapse into a conversation which reveals the political and economic orientation of the managing class. The opinions the two men express are seen to be ludicrous, in part because of Carl and MacMahon's obvious incompetence and in part because of the clear difference between their delusions and reality. The presence of a destroyer squadron in the harbor and MacMahon's recent visit aboard the flagship occasions a rhapsody on what a "wonderful organization" the Navy is because of the rigidly authoritarian, disciplined,

23 For Booth's discussion of the presence of irony in fiction in light of authorial silence, see The Rhetoric of Fiction, pp. 304-08.
undemocratic--one might conclude *fascistic*--way it is run (155). From there MacMahon embarks on a rambling and incoherent diatribe about economics, arguing in favor of *laissez-faire* capitalism. Everything conspires to discredit the bourgeois position here without explicit commentary. The adulatory talk about the Navy is undercut by the revelation in Carl and MacMahon's continued conversation about the recent Honda Point grounding in which the same blind obedience to authority that MacMahon so admires caused seven ships to run aground "one on top of the other" and the drowning of Carl's brother-in-law (157). MacMahon's paean to *laissez-faire* capitalism is vitiated by his characterization of Herbert Hoover as "a man committed to I know not what reckless policy of government interference in private business" (162). The point is clinched when Carl and MacMahon turn to see that in their absence the lights in the factory have come back on and to realize that "all the time they had been pushing through the brush they had been going in the wrong direction" (165).

The contrast between their fantasies and reality serves to show Carl and MacMahon as fools; furthermore, Chapter Eight makes plain the contrast between their futility in stumbling around on the tideflat and the purposefulness of the workers' concerted efforts during the power failure to free the hoist man pinned against a wall by a giant log. While the useless pair of Carl and MacMahon praise the rigid structure of the Navy system, hierarchy among the workers is
eliminated as all the men pitch in together to help, each fulfilling his needed task. The men are not individuated here; in the dark one can not be distinguished from another as they work in silent cooperation toward a useful end.

The pattern of contrast between groups of characters representing management and labor and between individual characters such as Carl and Hagen extends to other pairs of characters as well, characters who occupy other positions in the class struggle. One such pair consists of Hagen's son Johnny, the worker with whose "education" Part Two is concerned, and Walt Connor, another young worker in the factory. They have in common not only youth but plans frustrated by economic circumstances: Johnny, newly-graduated from high school, has had his hopes of saving enough money for college in the fall dimmed by a pay cut the factory management has introduced, and Walt is in a similar fix, having had some college experience but unable to return because his income is keeping his family afloat financially. But their similarities extend no further. Walt is destined for the bourgeoisie and Johnny, though he does not yet know it, for the proletariat. At this point in the novel Johnny is all potential; in fact the chapter introducing him opens with the words "He was lost," which apply not only to his physical situation in the darkened factory but to his political situation as well (99). Johnny is terribly self-conscious, timid, and unsure of himself. Walt, on the other hand, is a self-aggrandizing and self-centered phony who regales Johnny
as they sit smoking on the loading dock with the most patent nonsense about college life, especially the nobility and seriousness of purpose of fraternities. The naive and credulous Johnny believes every word, but it is obvious that Walt recognizes Johnny as a willing listener. Corroborative evidence about Walt's phoniness comes when a shout is heard from inside the factory: "Let her up! Can't you see she's tired?" (113). The reader knows from having heard these words in the preceding chapter, which covered the same time span on the inside of the factory, that they are uttered in the course of some innocent horseplay in the darkness, but Walt, attempting to impress Johnny with his manly worldliness, says, "'They're screwing in there.'" When Johnny asks him how he knows this, Walt remarks sagely, "'I know'" (113). From here it soon develops that the reason Walt was being friendly to Johnny in the first place was to use him to get close to Marie Turner, one of the factory's female employees whom Walt takes to be "'damn good nooky'" (116). Johnny himself, "putting two and two together," (114), suspects the truth, that Walt "had come to him with such complete fraternity-brother affability with this secret mission always at the back of his mind" (115). He immediately rejects what he thinks is "pessimistic disloyalty in crediting such morbid cunning to his new-found friend" (115), but the reader recognizes the truth.

As the novel proceeds Johnny and Walt develop along diverging lines. Walt, looking out for his own interests,
resent the gathering unrest in the plant because he thinks it will hurt his chances for promotion. He continually plays up to Carl, implicitly casting his lot in the class struggle with the bourgeoisie. He shows himself for the treacherous cad he is—and awakens Johnny to the fact—at the beginning of Part Two when he attempts to kidnap and assault Marie Turner after he has succeeded in putting Johnny up to inducing Marie and her sister Ellen to ride home from the factory in his car. As Part Two continues, Johnny visits Ellen Turner and establishes some personal friendliness with her, whereas Walt is visited by MacMahon's slutty daughter Rose and thinks of her lustfully. And where Johnny attends the strike-planning meeting in Winters' yard, Walt is visited by Carl who offers to install him in Morley's place as assistant foreman, general lackey, and spy on the night shift workers. Johnny, at the same time, is coming to class-consciousness through his participation in the strike and his egalitarian association with his fellow workers. In fact, Johnny's sense of solidarity with the other workers directly produces his awakening. When the night shift workers gather before the factory at the beginning of their shift and discover that Hagen, Winters, and about twenty other men have been summarily dismissed from their jobs as suspected troublemakers, they need to find out if the day shift has finished the big export order to determine what leverage they have with the company in case of a strike. Johnny uses his own initiative and intelligence on behalf of the workers to learn the crucial information
that "'they couldn't finish it'" (294). Then, as the strike actually gets underway with the day shift workers stopping work early and the massed workers chanting to those still in the factory to "'Come on out!,'" Johnny is "swept off his feet" (297). "Nothing else ever gave him the strange feeling of excitement and strength, and all during the week he treasured the memory, calling on it like some powerful charm to help him in the moments of despair" (298). Other lessons are brought home to Johnny through his new clarity of vision. First, he learns "how the newspapers were run . . . with everything just a little bit wrong" in the accounts of the strike slanted in favor of capital (299). Soon, through the news that Walt has been given Morley's job, comes an additional lesson:

Something he had not understood before became clear to him. Somehow he had thought that people worked and rose in the world. In one swift glance at Walt riding importantly in Carl's car the picture was reversed and now in the depth of his bitterness he saw Walt rising in the world, yes, but rising in the way that a corpse rises when it has lain for a long time under water, rising and rotting as it was pushed out by the strong cold currents at the bottom . . . . (304)

Thus the early and developing contrast between Johnny and Walt becomes clear to Johnny at the moment of his transfiguration into class-consciousness.

Another result of Cantwell's narrative strategy in The Land of Plenty is his reliance on symbolism to support the
theme of the novel. In this respect also The Land of Plenty is more complex than Jews Without Money or The Disinherited. In those novels symbolism was used, for the most part, sporadically and incidentally, but in The Land of Plenty it is more closely unified with theme since it has to help carry the burden of the argument.

The outstanding example of the rhetorical use of symbol in the novel is the power and light motif which operates in the section of the novel which bears that title. The power failure with which the novel opens symbolizes the confusion into which capitalism has fallen in the pre-revolutionary situation of the late twenties and early thirties. Its representative, Carl, is lost and uncertain and virtually paralyzed in the resulting darkness. The workers, on the other hand, move about with assurance. The trope is extended into Chapter Two with Hagen's appearance before Carl. Hagen has a flashlight stored in an emergency tool box near where Carl is standing, but when he gives it to Carl to help him in finding his way outside to call the power house about the blackout, Carl first cannot operate the flashlight--he fumbles with the switch--and then loses control of it altogether as he drops it. In a pivotal scene later in Part One the workers' gathering strength is symbolically indicated when Winters takes the flashlight from Carl by force, striking him in the jaw when Carl stupidly refuses to let go of it when Winters needs it to aid the effort to free the trapped hoist man. The symbolic value of this incident as a metaphor for the
proletarian revolution is underscored in a subsequent chapter in a conversation between Winters and Frankie Dwyer, another worker:

"I heard you konked him," Dwyer said. "Yeah." "What was the matter?" "He wouldn't give me the flashlight." (175)

When the flashlight proves insufficient, Winters makes another symbolic act, entirely functional to the action of the novel, when he commandeers MacMahon's car, in which his daughter, Rose, and her boyfriend, Roger, are sitting, to use its headlights to illuminate the rescue work area. Other symbolic points are made in this episode. While serious life-and-death matters are taking place inside the factory and the workers are busy with the compassionate effort to free their trapped comrade, whom by the way none of them knows personally, the bourgeois characters Rose and Roger demonstrate contrasting behavior in their self-centered and decadent necking in the car. That they have been doing this is indicated when Winters arrives at the car and notices that Rose's "dress had been pulled up around her waist" (169-70). When Rose and Roger sit dumbfounded at Winters' repeated requests for a flashlight, Winters commandeers the car, and as he is driving it across the open ground to the side of the factory, the bourgeois characters are shown to be tense and frightened, and the worker thrilled and confident, at his assumption of control and power (171-72).

The symbolic value of the power and light issue is
further indicated when both return to the factory while Carl and MacMahon, who as managers ought to be in control of such matters, are lost out on the tideflat. After they make their way back to the factory, Carl tries to reassert his control--and to impress his boss--by being authoritarian with the workers, ordering them back inside the factory. It is at this point that political power begins really to shift to the workers as by virtue of their massed numbers they force MacMahon to override Carl's hasty and arbitrary on-the-spot firing of Winters and Hagen. Part One concludes on this note as the factory whistle blows, dismissing the men from work, and they see the light concerning effective solidarity.

The whistle blew, a weak, steam-saving blast. The crowd broke up. The young guys raced for the clock. The old hands lagged behind, talking it over. They were proud; they were excited; some of the kids began yelling as they ran toward the factory. They had their first sure knowledge of their strength. (203-04)

Thus the subject of the class struggle is treated in The Land of Plenty and the novel's political message communicated through the devices of symbolism, characterization, and point of view. An impression of realism and intensity is given through an intimate behind-the-scenes look, as it were, at an episode in the class struggle. But realism and intensity were not the only requisites of the Proletarian novel, according to its theoretical critics; imparting a
sense of revolutionary optimism should be another of its effects, and in this respect *The Land of Plenty* is a problem novel. Part One certainly ends on a note of revolutionary optimism; indeed everything in that part of the novel moves toward such a conclusion. Revolutionary optimism is also conveyed through Johnny Hagen's development of class-consciousness in Part Two. It is objectified, somewhat in the manner of *The Disinherited*, not only by his militant acts on behalf of the strike but also by his symbolically "becoming a man" as he wins and makes love to Ellen Turner during the workers' occupation of the factory. But the novel's violent conclusion leaves the reader uncertain as to the future of both the plywood factory strike and the class struggle in general. The workers' occupation of the factory degenerates into a pitched battle with the police in which Johnny's father is shot, Ellen is clubbed down by a cop, and Johnny, beaten up and crying, left hiding with two other workers on the tideflat in the rain, wondering what to do next. Cantwell himself admitted he did not know how to satisfactorily resolve his plot because he "couldn't imagine clearly what would happen" if the workers seized a factory. In 1934 the first successful sit-down strikes at the Akron rubber plants were still two years away, so in light of the contemporary facts to which Cantwell might have looked for imaginative guidance, the ending of *The Land of Plenty*...
Plenty may have been realistic. Cantwell also complained that radical critics had done little to provide authors with guidance on such matters, and indeed it was not until 1935 that the Leftist commentator Edwin Berry Burgum announced that a fictional strike did not have to be won for a Proletarian novel to communicate revolutionary optimism. However the problem for Cantwell may have lain in the oversimplification of the stock revolutionarily optimistic ending. The ambiguous ending which the novel has is another element in its complexity, relative to Gold's and Conroy's books, and in its ambiguity may also be more true-to-life than an ending in revolutionary optimism. The Land of Plenty thus illustrates the conflict that occasionally faced Proletarian writers, the conflict between literary and political truth.

Studs Lonigan

James T. Farrell's Studs Lonigan trilogy is the most complex of the four novels examined in this study. As indicated above, Farrell was among the literary fellow-travelers who criticized "leftism" on the part of radical critics. The fullest articulation of Farrell's position did not come until his publication of A Note on Literary Criticism in 1936, a year beyond the limits of coverage of this study. But as Alan M. Wald points out in a very recent study of Farrell's

thought in the late twenties and thirties, his responses in the 1934 *New Masses* "Authors’ Field Day" symposium showed "an unruly independence" from the standard Communist position on the question of the subordination of literary to political values. According to Wald, Farrell believed that "in order to survive, a literary work must transcend the advocacy of immediate political positions." Studs Lonigan does, ultimately, have a political purpose, but not just a political purpose. It is written to communicate a Marxist understanding of social and historical phenomena, but only in part. It is also a naturalist study of a character shaped and driven by environmental forces. The literary qualities of Studs Lonigan are so little subordinated to its political purpose that the inculcation of its political message is subtle and indirect, so much so that the reader may not even be aware of such a message until near the end of the third volume of the trilogy.


27 The purpose of this study precludes a comprehensive reading of Studs Lonigan here; it will focus instead on the political theme in the novel and on those elements which convey it. If such a focus distorts the thematic proportions of the novel from a modern critical point of view, it should be remembered that Proletarian writers assumed that their audiences read literature, as they themselves wrote it, in the very palpable context of historic and economic circumstance. While readers trained in the approaches of the New Criticism and its successors may be disinclined to go beyond the limits of the text in interpreting Studs Lonigan, an examination of the novel in terms of the ideas that generated it and that were in the air around its original readers would focus on important aspects of the novel that may be generally ignored today.
In addition to its degree of literary complexity, the subject of *Studs Lonigan* differentiates it from the three novels previously studied. All of those approach the general subject of the class struggle from the side of the proletariat; *Studs Lonigan* approaches that subject from the bourgeois side, not in its sympathies, but in its concern with the rise and fall of a bourgeois character, Studs Lonigan himself. Studs' career spans the years 1916 to 1930 in the Irish Catholic community of Chicago's South Side. These exact years are important. A significant thematic difference between Farrell's novel and the previously-examined three books is the parallelism of the central character's career and the course of American history over the same period. Farrell establishes this parallel through the revealed thoughts and actions of Studs Lonigan, the references to actual historical events that dot the novel, and the careful documentation of chronology that occurs throughout. Both *Jews Without Money* and *The Disinherited* cover time spans as lengthy as that of *Studs Lonigan*, and the years covered in Conroy's book overlap the time span of *Studs Lonigan* nearly identically. But neither of those earlier novels is as thoroughly documented as Farrell's.28

28 In another trilogy from Rideout's fourth category--Josephine Herbst's *Pity Is Not Enough* (1933), *The Executioner Waits* (1934), and *Rope of Gold* (1939)--we find another approach to connecting the careers of fictional characters to American history in the Proletarian novel, perhaps an even more ambitious attempt than Farrell makes in *Studs Lonigan*. Herbst presents the saga of the descendents of Joshua Trexler, a nineteenth-century farmer-entrepreneur-citizen, himself the descendent of one of the earliest settlers of the territory
This thorough documentation makes Studs Lonigan a realistic novel. In addition to deliberately charting Studs' career against the background of contemporary American history, Farrell depicts it in painstaking detail over the three volumes of the trilogy. In this manner, showing Studs in the midst of the banalities and trivialities that constitute his milieu, Farrell communicates a sense of the life of which of eastern Pennsylvania, and of some of the different branches that grow off that trunk of the family tree. She traces their history from just after the Civil War through the economic and political upheavals of the 1930's, using the career of one family as a Marxist paradigm for the experience of the bourgeois during the years of the muscular expansion, decadence, and collapse of American capitalism. Of the children of Joshua and Mary Trexler of Locust Valley, Pennsylvania, Joseph goes South to make his fortune carpetbagging after the Civil War, gets in over his head with political and financial scoundrels engaged in railroad development fraud, and is subsequently ruined and defeated, though retaining to the end his faith in the efficacy of "a little capital" to lead to spiritual happiness. His brother David succeeds where Joseph fails, settling in Oregon and becoming a drugstore chain magnate, banker, landowner and stock market bull. But David's economic success is counterbalanced by his humanistic deficiencies, also an inversion of Joseph's situation. When the Depression hits, David is clearly a bewildered dodo. Sister Anne, another believer in the magic of "a little capital," marries and moves to an Iowa farming town where her life becomes a constant and never wholly successful struggle to lift her family out of debt. Two of her daughters in the twentieth-century generation, Rosamond and Victoria Wendel, grow up with the legend of Uncle Joe and the example of Uncle David and function in the proletarian side of the dialectic as they and the young men they marry become radicalized. Rosamond dies, indirectly from the perfidy of the capitalist system, a young woman, but Victoria carries on to become involved in a Caribbean Marxist revolution in the 1930's, while her husband Jonathan Chance and Rosamond's husband Jerry Stauffer work as radical organizers during the Depression. Herbst's novels generally sacrifice the realistic intensity of Studs Lonigan for breadth of historical and thematic coverage, and their effect is consequently not so revolutionarily cathartic, nor are they as instructive in the rhetorical use of literary technique.
Studs is a part and illustrates the thoroughness with which Studs and his world interact and shape each other. The novel saturates the reader in Studs' distasteful experience for over 1,000 pages, working by sheer quantity of material, as much as by the quality of Studs' experience, to achieve the intensity of impression necessary to the book's purpose.

Farrell's narrative method contributes to the novel's realism and intensity of impression because it allows the reader an inside view of Studs' deterioration and collapse. Farrell is ostensibly removed from the novel, and he denies his omniscient narrative voice the privilege of direct commentary on the events and personalities presented. Instead of telling of Studs' decline, therefore, Farrell shows it, allowing the reader to see and feel for himself. For the most part, the reader travels with Studs, although the point of view occasionally shifts—to that of Studs' father, for instance, early in Young Lonigan and late in Judgment Day, and to those of various characters in the interchapters in The Young Manhood of Studs Lonigan—to provide relief and perspective. Farrell's narrative strategy allows him to manipulate carefully the aesthetic distance between the reader and Studs, and this manipulation of distance is essential to the novel's effect. The reader must be close enough to Studs to have some sympathy for him and to feel intensely both the pathos of what happens to him and revulsion for his loathsome behavior. At the same time, the reader must judge Studs in order to understand his case in
moral and political terms. Farrell's narrative strategy permits the operation of irony against Studs, aligning the reader's judgment with the author's values.

In *Studs Lonigan*, political and literary considerations are fused in a unified whole. The nature of the character of Studs Lonigan (which is at the thematic center of the novel from any perspective), the novel's narrative strategy, and its realistic treatment are all functions of Farrell's rhetorical approach. In the absence of reliable commentary, the reader's recognition of the decadence of the bourgeoisie depends upon his reaction to the bourgeois characters in the novel, principally Studs, who is shown to be clearly inferior in awareness and knowledge and unable to recognize his own ignorance. The reader's feeling of superiority to Studs is insured by the irony that Farrell turns against him. Moreover, as the reader despises Studs, so he craves poetic justice for him. In the Proletarian novel, poetic justice is historical justice, so that here Studs will ultimately be defeated by the very thing which he, his family, and his peers most fear--reality, which is social change. Farrell subtly intensifies the novel's political message by the same means that he uses to intensify the feeling of the verisimilitude of Studs' life, by rendering the process of Studs' decline in massive and banal detail. The satisfaction the reader craves in seeing Studs punished is withheld when it is most desired, when Studs is young and at his chauvinistic, bigoted, crypto-fascistic, swaggering worst. There are
moments in the novel—when he and nine of his pals waylay and beat up two Jewish boys just because they are Jews, for instance, or when he runs wild during the 1918 Armistice celebration, hitting people at random on the street—when even the more sophisticated reader, not to mention the presumably more grossly emotional proletarian reader, would dearly love to grab Studs by the throat and shake him until he crumbles (like attacking the arch-villain in an old-fashioned melodrama), so intense is the despicability with which Studs conducts himself, and so unwilling is Farrell to slap him down poetically. Such a reaction is common to the manifestly unjust world of naturalistic fiction, wherefrom the author, like his God, has vanished. But Farrell, like a good parent, realizes the value of withholding the easily-bought satisfaction of immediate gratification in favor of the more profound, if less spectacular, reward of ultimate justice, administered when the reader can appreciate it. Studs must not be defeated on his own terms, by, say, being beaten up or killed by one of his victims. Although this would serve the immediate end of poetic justice, it would serve only that end and not historic justice as well. He is, of course, beaten up, by his old nemesis Weary Reilley at the 1929 New Year's Eve party at the end of The Young Manhood, but this is, perhaps curiously, not wholly satisfactory. For one thing, Studs' more brutally violent days, when dying by the sword by which he had lived would have been more appropriate, are several years behind him at this
point. For another, Weary can be neither the champion nor the agent of any kind of justice beyond whatever exists in the streets. There is ironic justice in the fact that the end of Studs' career as a tough guy comes at the hands of the same punk whom Studs had licked to commence it, but Weary's beating of the helplessly drunk Studs represents no victory over what Studs and Weary both stand for. Studs must go down to defeat in ignorance, at the hands of forces he does not understand, instead of those he does, so that the reader may see in his defeat the triumph of a new order and one wholly alien to Studs' reality. Both poetic and historic justice, then, reside with the proletarian marchers shown at the end of Judgment Day as the tide of the future, in contrast to the fleeting present and vanished past of Studs Lonigan.

The salient points of Studs' character indicate the faults of his segment of the American bourgeoisie, so that his character and career are keys to Farrell's political statement about the inevitable doom of that class. In order to elucidate that statement, my analysis will trace the pattern of Studs' career as it both is determined by and reveals his personal characteristics. I will also consider the personality of Studs' father, Paddy Lonigan, and the characteristics of other members of the novel's Irish Catholic community, since their similarity to Studs on important points indicates the cloth from which Studs is cut. Also, the analogies between aspects of Studs' personality and the
larger American personality and between stages in Studs' career and those in American history from 1916 to 1931 deserve attention as the means by which Farrell broadens the theme of Studs Lonigan. Finally, attention will be given to the indirect rhetorical devices of irony and figurative language.

There is, as a beginning, Studs' image of himself as a tough guy, virtually the first thing the reader learns about him, which he endeavors to establish as his public reputation, and around which he orders his entire life, clinging to it long after the objective reality of his toughness has passed. The opening of volume one of the trilogy, Young Lonigan, establishes this aspect of Studs' character and also demonstrates Farrell's ironic method. It is clear from the very outset of Studs' career the difference between his picture of himself and the reality of his actions. On the night of his graduation from St. Patrick's grammar school, Studs is sneaking a smoke and mugging at himself in the bathroom mirror. He considers smoking one of the emblems of his emerging manhood, but the fact that he reverts to childish behavior by desperately trying to hide the evidence of his smoking from his mother shows the difference between his self-image and reality. The reader gains similar knowledge from the difference between his outward bravado and his actual caution about getting into a fight with Weary Reilley.

No, he wasn't [afraid of] mixing it with Reilley. . . . it was just . . . well, there was no use starting fights
unless you had to . . . and he'd never backed out of a scrap with Weary Reilley or any other guy. And that time he had pasted Weary in the mush with an icy snowball, well, he hadn't backed out of a fight when Weary started getting sore. He had just not meant to hit Weary with it, and in saying so he had only told the truth.29

Another part of Studs' self-image is that he is "a guy who didn't have any mushy feelings" (YL, 8). He reminds himself of this when he falls into a bit of romantic reverie about his secret flame Lucy Scanlan in the novel's opening scene. At the start of Section Two, Chapter Three, on a morning a few weeks after his graduation, Studs engages in some more mugging before the mirror, flexing his muscles and telling himself that he was not only tough and rough, but that he was also a scientific boxer. He swung and swished himself into a good perspiration, knocking out imaginary roughnecks as if they were bowling pins, . . . saying to himself that he was Young Studs Lonigan, or maybe only Young Lonigan, the Chicago sensation, now in training for the bout when he would kayo Jess Willard for the title. (YL, 68-69)

That same day Studs wins a fight with the dreaded Weary Reilley, reinforcing his tough-guy self-image and establishing his tough-guy reputation in the neighborhood. At the peak of his

29 James T. Farrell, Studs Lonigan, Modern Library edition (1932, 1934, 1935; rpt. New York: Random House, 1938), Young Lonigan, p. 6. Subsequent references will appear in the text and will be to this edition. The following abbreviations will be used in textual citations: for Young Lonigan, YL; for The Young Manhood of Studs Lonigan, YM; for Judgment Day, JD.
fame and glory, Studs takes a walk through Washington Park with Lucy, and they sit in a tree and hold hands and steal a few kisses. Studs is starting to fall in love with Lucy, and he feels the best he has ever felt.

He listened to the sounds of the park, and it seemed as if they were all, somehow, part of himself, and he was part of them, and them and himself were free from the drag of his body that had aches and dirty thoughts, and got sick, and could only be in one place at a time. He listened. He heard the wind. Far away, kids were playing, and it was nice to hear the echoes of their shouts, like music was sometimes nice to hear; and birds whistled, and caroled, and chirped, and hummed. It was all new-strange, and he liked it. He told Lucy it was swell, sitting in the park, way up in a tree. Lucy said yes, it was perfectly grand. Studs said: YEAH! (YL, 111-112)

Unfortunately for Studs, this is the best he will ever feel, because his obeisance to the tough-guy formula excludes the development of any "mushy" feelings such as love and tenderness. The next day he finds rumors of his love for Lucy scrawled in chalk on the fences and sidewalks of the neighborhood, and in his anger and humiliation Studs takes up with the Fifty-Eighth Street gang, who are tougher and more serious hoodlums than his Fifty-Seventh Street and Indiana Avenue pals. From here, the pattern of his career is established. Studs will continue to assert toughness and bravado over love and compassion, and his he-man behavior will confine his love-thoughts to the world of fantasy. They will never be realized, not even in his engagement to Catherine in volume three. Nor, for that matter, will Studs ever again be justified in his
physical violence. When Studs licks Weary Reilley that day in June, it is a triumph for the gutty little guy over the big, but ultimately cowardly bully, and for virtue over vice: Weary had asked for a fight by playing intentionally rough with Studs' friend Helen Shires, hurting her. When Studs holds Weary back from hitting Helen, Weary throws the first punch. And of course Weary shows his true colors when he takes advantage of a helplessly drunk Studs to get his brutal revenge at the 1929 New Year's Eve party. Studs' next fight is to establish his fitness to belong to the Fifty-Eighth Street gang by licking its champion, Red Kelly. Beyond that, Studs maintains his reputation through crap-game brawls and gang fights like the one that ends the big football game between the Fifty-Eighth Street Cardinals and the Forty-Seventh Street Monitors in The Young Manhood. These might conceivably be fair fights; at least Studs' opponents are roughly equal to him, even if his tactics are mostly dirty. But equally typical manifestations of Studs' toughness occur in his practice of rolling drunks, assaulting strangers in the park, and beating up whatever Jews and Negroes he and his gang can find when the mood to "do something" strikes. The reader's values are certainly affronted by such episodes, and the cowardice evident in them undercuts Studs' opinion of himself as the archetypal underdog, fighting bravely for the sanctity of the Irish, his neighborhood, and white America.

Studs is not exceptional in his conduct or his opinions either; both are approved if not shared by the very pillars
of the community.Shortly after his licking of Weary Reilley, Studs meets the father of his friend Johnny O'Brien, a man whom his own father admires as a successful businessman, since he owns a prosperous coalyard. "Old Man O'Brien" impresses Studs as a regular guy and the reader as an arrested adolescent by asking, "Who's the hardest guy in the gang?" and upon learning that it is Studs, suggesting "let's you and I mix" (YL, 94). Studs recalls an episode when Old Man O'Brien had "told [MacNamara the cop] where to get off at in regular he-man's language," threatening to "punch him all over the corner, and when he got through, wipe the street with him" (YL, 95). Later, during the jingoistic frenzy that accompanies the U.S. entry into World War I, this same cop applauds Studs, Red Kelly, and Kenny Killarney as they terrorize a smaller Jewish boy named Stein, when they tell him Stein's name and say that he had "spit on the flag." MacNamara "told the guys that they'd done right, but the next time to go back in the alley where they wouldn't cause such a commotion" (YM, 11-12). Later still, at the "mission" Studs attends at St. Patrick's Church, the evangelistic priest Father Shannon, inveighing against the Jazz Age and all its sins--particularly the intellectual--counsels physical violence in defense of the honor of Catholic womanhood (YM, 420).

Furthermore, Studs' character is shown to be entirely consonant with the mood of capitalist America through the novel's references to external events. The U.S. entrance into World War I legitimizes Studs' violent abuse of the
German Jewish boy Stein, and Studs' awareness of the national hatred of "the Huns" occasions his joining Red Kelly in taunting a German immigrant shoemaker. The Armistice celebration in the Chicago Loop provides Studs with ample excuse to express his patriotism through random and gratuitous acts of violence and lawlessness, and it stirs his lust as he watches women kissing soldiers in the streets. Studs' racial bigotry and love for violence are given further opportunity to operate during the 1919 Chicago race riot, part of the general outburst of anti-black and anti-foreign behavior and sentiment that swept the country in the years immediately following the war. In the Chicago riot Studs and his gang are eager participants, roaming the streets armed with clubs, sticks, knives, guns, razors, and brass knuckles. Studs himself brandishes a baseball bat and vows that "when he cracked a dinge in the head, the goddamn eight ball would think it had been Ty Cobb slamming out a homer off Walter Johnson" (YM, 73). They throw bricks "into the windows of houses where they thought niggers lived," but their only direct contact is with a ten-year-old Negro boy whom they strip, burn, and urinate on (YM, 74). In all, Studs is at his toughest during the period of American self-righteous nationalism during and just after World War I.

As events proceed and Studs clings to his tough-guy ideal through his twenties, he gets further and further out of touch with reality. He begins more and more to daydream and to wish that things were or had been different. By the time Judgment Day opens (February of 1931), Studs is manifestly a has-been,
his reputation destroyed at the hands of Weary Reilley and his body weakened by the pneumonia he caught from lying in the gutter the rest of that fateful night. But even before, through the days of his young manhood, the gap between what Studs thinks he is and is, so narrow in the summer of 1916, widens. Studs' self-confidence is somewhat shaken during the football game in _The Young Manhood_, Section Two, Chapter Eight, in the fall of 1922, when his talents prove to be something less than his estimation of them. Then over the next few years, Studs' drinking and carousing begin to take their toll on him as his physical stamina gradually weakens and he begins to develop an "alderman" about his midsection. In Chapter Nineteen, set in 1924, Studs, now going on 23, gets a chance to "show [the guys] he wasn't through like Doyle and Kelly, but was the old Studs Lonigan" in an impromptu boxing match with twenty-year-old Jack Morgan (YM, 304). But Morgan coolly gives Studs a boxing lesson until Studs loses his temper and starts slugging. Even then, however, "Morgan slugged back punch for punch" until Studs "knew he had been outfought and outboxed" and is left "winded . . . his arms . . . leaden," his back and head aching and his mouth cut (YM, 305). Obviously Studs is headed over the hill, but he recognizes this reality only dimly enough to make some short-lived attempts over the next few years to reform by going "on the wagon" or getting back into shape or living seriously. These attempts are marked by the same pattern that characterizes the rest of his life: he starts them with some glorious notion of
achievement in which he will show the world what he is made of, and he pursues them with some initial energy; but the drag of habit and inertia soon proves too much to overcome and he lapses back into his old routine. He always regrets his backsliding afterwards, but that regret inevitably takes the form of his thinking "if only things had been different!," which provokes more fantasizing, which further blinds him to the reality that he is going nowhere. Studs has enough imagination to envision other possibilities for his life, but they ultimately involve some feeling--love or compassion or even just civility--that Studs rejects as inconsistent with his hard-boiled egg self-image, an image which his environment reinforces. After enough such rejections Studs begins to think that the higher qualities of life are not just inconsistent with his self-image, but unattainable. He hates himself for their unattainability and the world for making them that way, and he expresses his anger in more self-destructive behavior, which only confirms his low opinion of his potential and widens the gulf between the ideal and the actual. His relations with women exemplify this. From his earliest days, Studs always has some shining virgin pedestalled in his dreams, and something less--a whore or, later, his fiancée Catherine, for whom he has "settled" but whom he continually wishes were better--in his arms.

A typical illustration of all this comes in the opening chapter of Section Three, 1924, of The Young Manhood. Here, Studs becomes disillusioned with the life of drinking and
whoring and goofing on the street corner at night that he has been leading for five years or more. "A wave of self-disgust [sweeps] through him" as he thinks of all the drinking and puking he has done (YM, 208), and he vows to go "on the wagon." Walking through Washington Park in this frame of mind "suddenly, he sensed that spring was in the air" and he feels part of the new life ready to burst forth around him (YM, 209). He even remembers other occasions on which "he had felt that life was going to start being different for him," but this time he vows that "it had to be. It would" (YM, 211). The spring imagery in this passage, like the lyricism of the description of his idyll with Lucy in the tree that summer day years before, suggests that such a breakthrough is indeed possible for Studs, and the reader's hopes for him rise. The death of his friend Arnold Sheehan shortly thereafter bolsters Studs' determination and sobriety, and his vivid fear of sudden death spurs him to join the YMCA and "take care of himself" (YM, 224). Fantasy helps him start working on this plan as on the way to the Y he tries to think of himself as "a prizefighter or some kind of an athlete putting himself in condition to come back. It made it appear more interesting and important that way. It was as if he was somebody in the limelight, a celebrity, and the world was interested in his success and failure" (YM, 230). As another item in his reformist agenda, Studs goes with Red Kelly to an organizational meeting and social gathering for a "'St. Patrick's Young People's Society'" being formed
initially to help raise money for the new church that Father Gilhooley wants to build for the parish (YM, 244). Red, it turns out, wants to go to exercise his budding political ambitions, and Studs consents when he thinks that "up there, he might see that girl, and he was still Studs Lonigan, and all the punks and everybody would treat him with respect" (YM, 239). "That girl" is the beautiful nameless blonde about whom Studs has fantasized since first sitting next to her in church Christmas morning of 1922 when, after a night of debauchery, he was likewise in a chastened state of mind. Her distance from his real world makes Studs romanticize her and think of her in terms of his better self: "there were things about him that nobody knew, and that he'd once thought Lucy would notice, but hadn't, and she [the blonde girl] would" (YM, 239). At the meeting Studs finds himself out of his element amongst parliamentary procedure and polite behavior and conversation. "An old, not-belonging feeling came upon him" and his resentment at the better-integrated people builds, so that when he finally does "with a forced effort of courage" ask the blonde girl to dance, he is already convinced that "it was just nerve, expecting to make the grade with her" (YM, 252). Thus when she declines his initial approach, Studs immediately retreats in anger--and into his fantasies.

He thought that if he had danced with her, she might have remembered him, remembered that she'd smiled at him at mass. If maybe she'd gotten a good look at him, she'd have remembered. But he never could have told her all that he'd thought of her since then. But maybe, maybe, if he had danced with her and things had gone right, maybe
he might have, at that. He would maybe have
said something like:
I never thought I'd find you here! (YM, 253)

None of this is what actually happened. Bitterly, Studs thinks that "it was all a goddamn pipe-dream," and angry with himself for having "missed his chance" he joins the "'Fifty-Eighth Street Alky Squad'" on the corner and gets helplessly drunk with them on paregoric (YM, 254). His attempt at reform is over. As this pattern is repeated through Studs' young manhood, the reader's disgust at his inability to change mounts.

The delusion and hypocrisy under which Studs lives extends to the St. Patrick's parishioners in general and beyond them to the entire American bourgeoisie. Studs' mother persists, in the face of her son's continued degeneracy through the years, in believing that Studs will "get the calling" to become a priest, and Studs' father is equally blind to what his son is becoming. On the occasion of one of Studs' more blatant debauches--Christmas Eve, 1922, when he staggers about drunk in public, insults his sister Fran and her date, goes with the boys to a "can house" where he escapes a police raid by leaping out a second-story window, and stumbles home after daylight Christmas morning--Paddy Lonigan's response is to sigh and ruminate on Studs as a chip off the old block, "a real Lonigan" (YM, 188). He wistfully asks Studs "to be more careful in the future" (YM, 189). In one of the interchapters that move beyond Studs' point of view in The Young Manhood, immediately after the account of Studs' violent behavior in
the post-football-game fight in which the star of the Monitors team, Jewboy Schwartz, is believed to have been killed, Paddy Lonigan is shown complacently telling his brother that "'Bill is all right; he's turned out fine, and I'm proud of him'" (YM, 134). In an earlier interchapter Mrs. Lonigan and Mrs. Frank Reilley, Weary's mother, are shown lying to each other about how fine their sons are growing up (YM, 43-44). Before Father Shannon's "mission" at St. Patrick's, the Lonigans debate around the supper table whether to attend, and Paddy thinks that "missions weren't meant for guys like himself who weren't sinners" and who "did all their duties to God and the Church" (YM, 342). Such deluded self-assurance shows up in Father Shannon himself, who believes that the evils of the modern age can only be defeated and America only defended from "'ruin and contamination'" by "'the Catholic young men, the Catholic girls of this nation'" (YM, 355) in their "'shining silvered innocence'" (YM, 351). Such pronouncements ring hollow in light of the typical behavior of these youth, and in their hypocrisy they mirror the duality in Studs' mind between the ideal and the actual.

The extension of such irony to the country at large occurs through the operation of the audience's historical awareness, encouraged by the dates given at the head of each major section of The Young Manhood and by the occasional references to public events. A 1930's audience would surely be aware, perhaps even as bitterly aware as Farrell is, of the hollowness of the twenties' sense of national strength
and well-being. Historical irony operated with regard to the mood of the twenties. Farrell, like Proletarian writers generally, was writing from a perspective which saw the 1920's as the height of capitalist decadence. Like Studs Lonigan, throughout the period bourgeois America traded on its past muscle-flexing, congratulating itself for having "kicked the Kaiser" and made the world "safe for democracy" in 1917-18, and basking in its present prosperity while blithely ignoring the rot developing beneath inflation and overproduction. Like Studs Lonigan, bourgeois America was whistling past the graveyard, and thirties readers, with the perspective of hindsight, knew it.

The reality that is closing in throughout the twenties on Studs and his class figures in the novel in two forms: social change and death. Not only Studs and his gang but the St. Patrick's parishioners in general fear the social change that they see happening relentlessly around them. And all the while, from his early days onward but increasingly through his young manhood, Studs is "afraid of Old Man Death" (YL, 190). As Studs moves through his twenties and sees his friends--Lee Cole, Paulie Haggerty, Arnold Sheehan, Shrimp Haggerty--begin to die one by one, mostly from dissipation, and sees his body and fighting skills degenerate, he becomes more and more sharply aware of the certainty of death. His constant fear of it signals the reader that Studs is prescient, and suspense builds in the novel as the reader senses with Studs the approach of his end. Disgusting
as Studs is, the reader must view with horror his repeated failures in the face of his awareness of approaching death to change the course of his life. Gradually, as Studs' career proceeds, contempt for his irresolution and moral weakness compounds the disgust the reader already feels for him because of his penchant for violence and debauchery, so that the death and social change he and his class so desperately fear come to be regarded as ministers of justice for Studs and his world. Farrell is thus implying what Mike Gold stated in _Jews Without Money_, that the revolution would "sweep this mess out of the world forever" and establish in its stead "a garden for the human spirit."

Throughout the first two volumes of the trilogy, when Studs is still nominally in his prime, Farrell uses wind imagery to signal the certain approach of the death Studs fears. The association is first established during Studs' happiest moment--his idyll with Lucy in the tree. As they sit and Studs ponders the joy of the present moment, aware that it is fleeting, "Time passed through their afternoon like a gentle, tender wind, and like death that was silent and cruel" (_YL_, 114). Later that summer, when the memories of his victory over Weary Reilley and his tender moments with Lucy are beginning to fade, Studs begins to feel uneasy, "that he wanted something, and . . . didn't know what it was," and these thoughts are accompanied by the information that "the wind sounded like there were devils in it" (_YL_, 124). At the end of _Young Lonigan_, at a time when outwardly Studs
is robust and on the threshold of his young manhood, he drifts with a couple of friends through Washington Park, past the tree where he and Lucy had sat a few months before. Here Studs senses that his best moments are behind him and that the future leads only toward the grave. As the park darkens, "the wind blew more steadily, until its wail sounded upon Studs' ears like that of many souls forever damned" (YL, 199). Finally, at the very moment in The Young Manhood when Studs senses new life through the coming of spring, the immutability of approaching death is signalled by the wind imagery, undercutting for the reader Studs' illusion of reform. Feeling "chilly" Studs walks out of Washington Park toward Fifty-Eighth Street. "He looked at the trees which spread before him, like corpses, with the wind saddening through them" (YM, 212).

The implications of vengeful death and the glee with which such vengeance is anticipated distinguish the Marxist variety of naturalist fiction from the usual. As a character in the naturalist scheme, Studs is at the mercy of forces beyond his control. Ordinarily, the reader would sympathize with such helplessness, but in the Proletarian novel the situation is reversed. Frightful naturalistic inevitability becomes revolutionary optimism, and the impersonal forces of history and society, no longer horrifying evidence of the absence of a loving God from the universe, become purgatives. In Studs Lonigan, Studs and his class are plainly bourgeois rot whose removal will improve the world. This inference is
warranted from the pattern of events in the novel, inasmuch as Farrell never speaks directly. However, he does have a spokesman in the novel, young Danny O'Neill, a minor character but one who gets to have his way. O'Neill stands out from the others in the neighborhood not only for his generally good behavior and seriousness of mind, but for his trained skill in boxing and baseball and his knowledge of the finer points of football. Also, while Studs and his gang are mired in their hoodlum routine, Danny is pursuing his education at the University of Chicago, financing it by working nights at a gas station. All these sharp contrasts between O'Neill and the other young men in the novel serve to establish him as a reliable spokesman for Farrell, even if the reader does not know, as a proletarian audience would not, that he is Farrell. Interchapter XXII, falling soon after the St. Patrick's "mission" and a few scenes that present Studs and his gang at their usual goofing and drinking to show that the mission has had no effect on them other than to confirm their self-righteous opinions, focuses on O'Neill as he reads late one night at the Upton Service Station where he works. Here is the most direct political commentary in the novel. O'Neill's study has shown him that "the world was all wrong," and an incident at the mission had "crystallized many things in Danny's mind." Seeking answers from Father Shannon as "a University student who had lost his religion," one of the things the priest had been particularly critical of in his sermon, O'Neill gets the cold reply that Father Shannon is
"very busy." From this O'Neill sees that the problem in his culture is "a downright hatred of truth and honesty" (YM, 369). He goes on, in the kind of exultation that the reader is to feel if he recognizes what Danny has, to realize that his neighborhood "was all a part of a dead world; it was filthy; it was rotten; it was stupefying." To balance these negative thoughts, "he envisioned a better world, a cleaner world, a world of ideals such as that the Russians were attempting to achieve" (YM, 370), and in language markedly similar to Mike Gold's, he thinks that his mission in life will be to become a writer so that he can "destroy the old world with his pen [and] help create the new world" (YM, 371).

Throughout the trilogy, the St. Patrick's parishioners continually complain about the "lousy kikes" who are buying up property in South Chicago and reselling to the "dirty niggers." When such bigotry seems to be triumphant, the reader may be consoled by the assurance that no matter how many Jews and Negroes Studs batters and no matter how vociferously he complains about Reds and Bolsheviks, the days of such attitudes and the people who hold them are numbered. The more Studs slips into fantasy, the more obvious it becomes that reality is against him. Reality of course is a primary weapon in the Marxian arsenal, given the "scientific" analysis of dialectical materialism. That reality in the form of social change is coming sure as tomorrow is evident from several episodes in the novel. One is juxtaposed with one of the first outward signs of Studs' physical deterioration,
his boxing come-uppance at the hands of young Jack Morgan. Immediately after this scene, as Studs and his buddies are licking their wounds (Red Kelly has also gotten a lesson in scientific boxing from young Danny O'Neill), they walk over to Washington Park where the "Bug Club," a gathering of intellectuals, is holding one of its discussion sessions. On the way, Red Kelly, the most oratorical and opinionated of Studs' friends, complains about "'the goddamn shines . . . getting too frisky around here'" and frequenting the park boathouse. The "'Polacks and Dagoes'" are inferior races, says Kelly, and "'niggers are the same, only the niggers are the lowest'" (YM, 306). But a speaker at the Bug Club, Jim Connolly, who cows Studs' gang into respect by his size and reputation and demonstrates his willingness to insure order while he speaks by offering to send "'any two or three'" in the crowd who might try to heckle him "'home with your snotty faces in a sling,'" reports sociological facts (YM, 313). These are "'certain aspects of urban growth . . . relevant to the question of race prejudice in Chicago'; facts, "not mere hearsay, but plausible ideas presented by members of the Department of Sociology at the University of Chicago, and developed from the work they had already done on a community research programme" (YM, 312). Connolly explains the concentric zone model of urban development and ends by saying, "all these factors produced a pressure stronger than individual wills," the efficacy of which is central to bourgeois American myth, "and resulted in a minor racial migration of Negroes
into the white residential districts of the south side. Blather couldn't halt the process. Neither could violence and race riots. It was an inevitable outgrowth of social and economic forces" (YM, 313). Where Connolly stands in the class struggle is evident from some information related by Jim Doyle as the gang walks out of the park. "'He was in jail during the war for being a pacifist,'" Doyle says. "'And a few years back he went out to agitate at a coal strike in Colorado, and the police kicked out a couple of his front teeth. But even though I know he's wrong, he's a smart man'" (YM, 314). That Connolly is right and Doyle wrong is demonstrated in the immediately following interchapter that begins Section Four of The Young Manhood. The fact is related that "at eleven o'clock on the second Sunday in February, the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and twenty-six," the first services in the new St. Patrick's Church were conducted "and standing in the rear of the church were four new and totally edified parishioners. Their skin was black" (YM, 319-20). Thus it is plain that facts and social reality are on the side of the proletariat and against Studs.

As the trilogy moves on into the third volume, Judgment Day, and as Studs and the twentieth century move into their third decades, both Studs and American capitalism become has-beens. Yet both try to maintain an air of bravado. Studs becomes increasingly nostalgic and fantasy-ridden, living less and less in a realized world and more and more in a world of wishes and hopes. The spokesmen for American capitalism—
economists, big businessmen, politicians--are heard throughout the last volume assuring radio listeners and newspaper readers and newsreel viewers that, in the words of one such spokesman, "'we are now again on a solid footing, and we shall see, in the next six months, another commercial upswing'" (JD, 59). The irony is surely obvious to a 1935 audience. The wedding of Studs to American capitalism--and the benightedness of both--is indicated here in Studs' purchase of 80 shares of stock in "'Imbray Securities'" (JD, 51). Studs invests all his blind faith, in addition to his $2,000 in savings, in "'the public utilities of the Middle West and the brain of . . . Solomon Imbray'" (JD, 50). Actual events once again tell the audience the truth about Studs. "Solomon Imbray" is Farrell's fictionalized name for Samuel Insull, who in 1934 was on trial in Chicago for fraud, embezzlement, and violation of federal bankruptcy laws as the result of the collapse of his vast holding company empire. A contemporary audience could hardly miss the reference.

As time passes, the fear of social change begins to harden into fascism for Studs and others. In the opening scene of Judgment Day, as Studs, Red Kelly, and a couple of others are riding on the train back to Chicago from Shrimp Haggerty's funeral in Terre Haute, Indiana, the talk turns to politics and Red complains about Chicago Mayor William Hale Thompson "'kissing nigger babies and playing up to the shines.'" "'Any man who does that ought to be run out of town on a rail,'" Red says, because "'the jiggs in Chicago are dynamite, and if they
ever break loose, it's going to be hell to pay. And right now the dirty nigger-loving Reds are playing up to them to stir them up.'" Studs replies, "'Let the niggers just get tough. We'll hang them up on every telephone pole in the city, just the same as we did in 1919,'" and Red says, "'We ought to give them the same kind of medicine they get in the South and not even let them sit next to a white man on a streetcar, let alone vote.'" They agree also that "'Father Moylan . . . on the radio'" has been telling the truth about "'the bankers, and the Reds, too'" (JD, 14). "Father Moylan" here is obviously the "Radio Priest," the reactionary Father Charles Coughlin. 30

Failing to recognize what is really taking place socially and economically, bourgeois like Studs and his father blame the "'Jew international bankers'" and "'the Reds who want anarchy here like they got in Russia'" for the Depression (JD, 76). Studs thinks "maybe Mussolini was smart, all right. It might be good for this country to give kids the same thing [military training], because when they grew up, if they were needed for war to repel a foreign invader like the Japs or the Russian Reds, they'd not go into it green" (JD, 72). Paddy Lonigan, like Studs' friends Red Kelly and Muggsy McCarthy, is a believer that "Father Moylan" is going to

30 Admiring a Father Coughlin figure is a sign of incipient fascism in the Proletarian novel. In The Land of Plenty, Johnny Hagen's loud-mouthed, do-nothing, and anti-semitic brother-in-law, Gerald, is an ardent admirer of "Father Condon," who, Gerald suggests, says that "'the Jews ruined Santa Barbara [California]'" (245).
"'wake Americans up"' to what the Reds are doing, "'exciting the niggers down in the black belt'" (JD, 308). "'We need a man like Mussolini here in America,'" Paddy says, "'a strong man to take things out of the hands of the Jew international bankers and the gangsters. If we had a man like Mussolini over here for two months, he'd straighten out a lot of people and put them where they belong, behind the bars or against a wall'" (JD, 307).

Laboring under delusions such as these, Studs is deaf to the wisdom offered by a man he meets one day in Washington Park, a man who tells him "'things won't get better . . . not under this system'" (JD, 181). Studs thinks the man is a "crazy bastard. A Bolshevik . . . a nigger lover, too," and he thinks, "Well, let the Bolsheviks get tough. They'd be taken care of, just the same as the shines were during the race riots of '19" (JD, 183).

Retaining his blind faith in the capitalist system, Studs stays with his Imbray stocks until his original $2,000 has eroded to $460, and then, having gotten his fiancée Catherine pregnant, he goes out in search of a job. In the course of his futile hunt, Studs gets soaked in a rainstorm, which brings on the relapse of his pneumonia that kills him as the novel ends. He goes to his death the deluded tough guy till the end, in his conscious hours before staggering home and falling into a coma assuming his old bellicose attitude toward the world at a time when cooperation is the only viable course of action.
He looked at people on the streets, their faces indistinct, and an unquenchable hate rose up in him, and he wanted to punch and maim and claw them. . . . The sneer from the old days, the old Studs Lonigan sneer of confidence and a superior feeling came on his face, and he threw back his aching shoulders. . . . He stopped in a building entrance-way and drew out his package of cigarettes. Shouldn't smoke. Phrigg you Doctor O'Donnell! Phrigg you Catherine! Phrigg everybody! He made the act of lighting a cigarette into a gesture of defiance. . . . A cold rain-drop spattered on his cheek. Some day, some day, goddamn it, if he wouldn't make the f----n world take back everything it was doing to him. Some day he would make the world, and plenty of damn bastards in it, too, eat what he was eating, and in bigger doses. Some day, he, Studs Lonigan, was going to bust loose like hell on wheels, and when he did, look out, you goddamn world! (JD, 380-81)

The language here is the strongest in a book notorious at the time of its publication for its strong language, as Studs flings his last vitriolic defiance at the world. This is the last gesture of the "old Studs Lonigan," decrepit beyond his years, yet basically still a child. While his language may be stronger and his hatred more intense than when he is first seen in the novel, his career closes as it began, with his lighting a cigarette just as a tough guy does, with his thinking a challenge to the world.

Paddy Lonigan shares his son's blindness to the bitter end. He drives bewildered through his old neighborhood as Studs lies at home dying, trying to "force himself to understand what was happening in the world" (JD, 423). As he does so two events come together dimly in his mind: the 1929
Crash and New Year's morning, 1929, "when he had been awakened by a call from the Washington Park hospital . . . and told to come down and see about his son, who had been picked up on the street, in the gutter, drunk and unconscious." He sees that "both of these days had brought upon him troubles that now linked up in one whole series that was breaking him," but he cannot fathom the meaning of it all (JD, 424). In case the audience has not made the association already, this last recitation of dates correlates Studs' downfall with that of American capitalism. Both began in the fateful year of 1929. As Paddy goes further down the street on foot he encounters a proletarian protest march, a parade of all types of humanity. "They passed in a steady and confusing flow, men and women, white and black, blond and swarthy, carrying crude signs, slogans written on cardboard and attached to sticks and poles, singing and shouting, a succession of slogans breaking forth clearly, causing Lonigan to knit his brows and shake his head in wonderment" (JD, 435-36). The procession is like a fresh breeze blowing through the novel, as the energy and dynamism of the people are contrasted to the inertia and lethargy which have ruled Studs and his father throughout the last volume of the trilogy. Paddy Lonigan watches the passing parade "like a man in a trance" of incomprehension, until "suddenly, like a man making an intellectual discovery, [he] realized that these people were happy. He could see them laugh. He could see how, between their yells and cries, they grinned, and their faces seemed
alive" (JD, 440). Their mood is sharply divergent from Paddy's bewildered depression, and their sense of happy community sharply contrasted to Studs' hostility just before his collapse and his feeling during his last conscious moments: "He sensed himself alone and helpless, removed from the commotion of a world that beat and hummed in his ears." Studs sinks into a final, fitting delirium as outside "two boys walked through the alley singing . . . out of tune" the song that has run throughout Judgment Day as Studs' theme song, Just a Gigolo (JD, 392).

So ends the career of the great Studs Lonigan, not with a bang, as it were, but with a whimper, a career that in its loose outlines parallels the course of capitalist America over the first thirty years of the twentieth century. In Studs Lonigan Farrell attempts to suggest such a parallel as he establishes Studs as typical of a certain segment of the American bourgeoisie. For the most part Farrell absents himself from his narrative, letting Studs' career speak for itself, as it most assuredly does. Studs Lonigan contains little explicit political material, and it is not written around an overt political theme. In both of these respects it differs from the three novels previously examined here, but it is no less political. Furthermore, the degree of indirectness with which its political message is communicated is high enough that it may appear to be, if it is not actually, about something other than the class struggle. Studs Lonigan is like few other characters in American literature, and in
his individuality he transcends being merely a typical member of a political category, and the account of his rise and fall assumes mythic proportions whose shadowy outlines make his story ill-suited to the Procrustean bed of dogmatic Marxian analysis. Still, in the context of the times and current of ideas in which it was written and read, a context which is an important part of the text of the novel itself, Studs Lonigan is a political creation. Approaching it as such both enhances our understanding of its meaning and provides instruction as to the application of literary techniques to political content in the Proletarian novel.
Chapter IV
Conclusion

The works examined in the preceding chapter were selected for inclusion as representatives of each of Walter Rideout's four major categories of the Proletarian novel and as evidence of the various ways in which Leftist writers combined literary form and political content. The present chapter will conclude the examination of the Proletarian literary movement in America by touching on three general matters. First, some summarizing statements are in order about the practice of the Proletarian novel based on the four novels examined here. Second, some appraisal of those novels in terms of the opposing criteria of thirties Leftist critics and modern aesthetics in general is necessary, since novels which were rated highly then are widely ignored today. Finally, the unique phenomenon of Proletarian literature needs to be folded back into place in the context of the American literary tradition.

We have seen that Proletarian writers adopted a variety of ways to handle the general subject of the class struggle. Two of the novels examined here, Jews Without Money and The
Disinherited, devote a good deal of attention to describing the conditions of proletarian life. A third novel, Studs Lonigan, portrays the bourgeois side of the Marxian dialectic, while the fourth, The Land of Plenty, focuses on a particular skirmish in the struggle between the classes. To generalize, the conditions of proletarian life are shown to be harsh and bleak materially; workers wage constant warfare against poverty and hunger and the indignity that the class system forces upon them. Yet a spiritual vitality bubbles beneath the crust of the material conditions of proletarian life. It erupts in different ways in the three novels which concern proletarian heroes: in Mike Gold's radical epiphany and attendant vision of the revolutionary Messiah who will harrow the East Side and establish the classless millennium, in Larry Donovan's affirmation of his birthright through the adoption of class-consciousness, in young Johnny Hagen's adoption of revolutionary understanding and solidarity with his fellow workers. This is the "hope and power" of the proletariat that the critical theorists called for and a sign of the conviction of Proletarian writers that the workers' revolution would make a better world. The "inadequacies and mendacities of the bourgeois culture" are also amply shown, whether in the corrupt greed of the Jews with money in Gold's novel, in the self-serving collusion of union officials in The Disinherited, or in the hypocrisy and incompetence of the managerial class in The Land of Plenty. Studs Lonigan is a thoroughgoing and naturalistically "objective"
Illustration of decadent bourgeois culture, its institutions, and its human representatives.

More particularly, we can find some common features in the portrayal of characters from the two warring classes. Proletarian heroes who undergo transformation to class-consciousness are central to two of the novels (Jews Without Money, The Disinherited), prominent in the third (The Land of Plenty), and an important political litmus in the fourth (Studs Lonigan). The experience actualizes their potential, fulfills them, vitalizes them, rids them of inertia, sloth, selfishness, and depression. For Mike Gold the ideal of the workers' revolution rescues a "lonely, suicidal boy" from the brink of despair and marks the "great Beginning" of his life.¹ For Larry Donovan, class-consciousness bestows manly stature worthy of his admired father's legacy and endows his life with new meaning in place of the "grandiose ambitions" and Horatio Alger fantasies of his youth.² For Johnny Hagen, solidarity directs his vision beyond himself and attends the consummation of his sexual and emotional maturity. And for Danny O'Neill, radical understanding provides the effective cathartic with which he can purge himself of the sickness of his neighborhood and gives the assurance of personal salvation against the certain doom of Studs Lonigan and the rest of the Chicago bourgeoisie. In the three novels in which

¹ Gold, Jews Without Money, p. 309.
² Conroy, The Disinherited, p. 286.
proletarian heroes are prominent, the combination of political and human interests involved in the major characters' adoption of revolutionary consciousness assures even the apolitical reader's approval--and perhaps the awakening of his consciousness. The reader is pleased to see the triumph of characters, worthy men all, with whom he has been invited, by one literary means or another, to identify and sympathize. In fact, proletarian characters generally attract sympathetic identification because they are repositories of basic human values. They may be materially poor, but they are spiritually rich. Displaying such virtues as hard work, sacrifice, love, compassion, and moral uprightness, they are admirable as human beings, not just as members of a social class. Burdened by the indignities of social injustice, their situations take on an added poignancy. Sometimes, however, as in the cases of Mike Gold's Aunt Lena and sister Esther and Larry Donovan's mother, sentimental treatment may make the reader feel that proletarian characters are too virtuous and the world too unjust for believability. But generally rhetorical effectiveness in the Proletarian novel proceeds from the attraction of sympathy, if not sentimentality, for working-class characters who display the best human traits. The result of the predicted or implied workers' revolution will then be the establishment of what Mike Gold called "a garden for the human spirit" (emphasis mine), instead of something so parochial as the dictatorship of the proletariat or the workers' control of the means of production.3

3 Gold, Jews Without Money, p. 309.
Such bloodless abstractions have little personal and emotional appeal for a literary audience and are not what proletarian characters in the novels are shown to want. They want respect, a decent life free from worry and persecution, the world's reciprocation of the values they believe in and practice. Perceiving this through the portrayal of proletarian characters, the reader appreciates revolutionary politics as humane, just, and ecumenical, not partisan.

If proletarian characters are sympathetically human, bourgeois characters, dialectally, are monstrous and unsympathetic. The desire to show the "inadequacies and mendacities" of the bourgeoisie leads to even greater flatness in bourgeois characters than in proletarian ones; apparently there are not many varieties of human evil available for portrayal once a character has been flattened by his placement in the hostile socio-economic class. Granville Hicks spoke for the Leftists in general when he said, "the most important thing about an individual is the social class to which he belongs." Presenting literary characters in such reductive terms necessarily meant their oversimplification in the Proletarian novel, especially with regard to bourgeois characters. The characters in Jews Without Money are caricatures, not people. Even in so relatively sophisticated a novel as The Land of Plenty, Cantwell's desire to contrast the bourgeois Carl's stupidity with the proletarian Hagen's competence

leads to the unlikelihood that Carl, the night shift foreman and efficiency expert, is ignorant of the existence, let alone the operating principle, of the factory's automatic sprinkler system. This ignorance dramatizes Carl's incompetence, which earns him the reader's enmity, but at the expense of believable roundness of character. Something of an exception to this general rule is the character of Studs Lonigan. Although he is representative of his social class, he is sufficiently individuated to avoid being stereotypical. Then, too, Studs is different from the bourgeois characters in other Proletarian novels in that he is the central figure of his own novel, not a villain who is subordinated to a proletarian hero. Serving Farrell's purpose to document the decadence of the bourgeoisie, he is more than a device or a plot functionary and is drawn in detail. Even so, Studs is flat; Farrell assumes that a product of the bourgeois culture is emotionally deprived. In this respect Studs displays a feature of naturalistic characters in general: the deterministic world in which they live reduces the possibilities for the free play of elements of character.

In addition to a general simplicity of characterization, the Proletarian novel shows a tendency toward simplicity in plot structure. Because of the nature of its audience, the Proletarian novel communicated meaning directly, by action, instead of by relatively indirect means such as character or symbol. The Proletarian "conversion novel," for instance, attempts nothing so complex as A Portrait of the Artist as a
Young Man, a "conversion novel" itself in which different levels of language and image patterns objectify the subtle psychological states of Stephen Dedalus. There is no reason why the portrayal of the coming-to-consciousness of a sensitive young proletarian could not be rendered as a profoundly personal experience, as is Stephen's journey to artisthood. The epiphany which Stephen experiences on the strand in Joyce's novel is no less a cause for optimism, though that optimism is not "revolutionary," than that which overcomes Larry Donovan or Mike Gold. But the Proletarian novelists let the movement of the plot alone convey political meaning in the conversion novels. They do not seek insights into the nuances of character. As Rideout notes, using action to communicate meaning was a procedure common among writers of strike novels also. A strike provided an apt framework for dramatizing the class struggle. The Land of Plenty, however, is apparently an exceptional strike novel, indeed an exceptional Proletarian novel, inasmuch as it uses symbols to underscore the meaning of the action.

According to Leftist theoretical critics, the treatment of the subject of the class struggle should be realistic, and, for the most part, it is in the four novels. They are realistic about the facts and conditions of proletarians' lives, and they are realistic in their attention to the details of work, especially factory labor in The Disinherited

and The Land of Plenty. This kind of realism shows the authenticity of presented pictures, a necessity in the view of Proletarian critics. Each of the four novels examined here proceeds from or recounts its author's own experience, and the authors either let the reader know that fact directly—as Gold does in Jews Without Money—or they so immerse the reader in detail that he feels the authenticity and realism of the pictures of life and work which they present. Another aspect making for a realistic impression is documentation, which has to do with an author's connection of the fictional events and settings of his novel to actual occurrences and places. While Mike Gold wrote about an actual place, Manhattan's Lower East Side, naming actual streets, he was nevertheless criticized, as we shall see below, for insufficient documentation. Indeed the events of Jews Without Money do seem to occur in a frozen and timeless cityscape. Gold tries so hard to give an authentic picture of life in the Lower East Side ghetto, and especially to communicate a sense of the difficulty of that life through lurid detail, that the effect is often a grotesqueness that casts shadows of unreality through the novel. These shadows are heightened by his exaggerated characterizations, and the lack of documentation means insufficient realistic light to dispel them. It is Gold's insistence that "all these things happened ... [and] were part of our daily lives, not lurid articles in a Sunday newspaper" and the obvious autobiographical tone of his novel that convince the audience of the
reality of the life described, not objective documentation. More careful documentation does appear in the other three novels, however, with references or allusions to dates, places, events, and actual persons contributing to the feel of realism and authenticity in each.

As far as psychological realism is concerned, Jews Without Money and The Disinherited are generally lacking, principally because the characters are not drawn in sufficient depth to allow the audience insight into their minds. Larry Donovan is not shown to have many feelings about the experiences he undergoes, and Mike Gold's emotions consist largely of two extremes: the childish wonder of his young self and the revolutionary indignation of his adult self. The Land of Plenty succeeds at showing the thoughts and feelings of a variety of characters through its shifting point of view technique, but in the second half of the novel the psychological realism in Cantwell's portrait of Johnny Hagen is purchased at the price of revolutionary optimism. The degree of psychological realism in Studs Lonigan is the highest of any of the four novels since the reader is able to see into Studs' thoughts by virtue of the novel's narrative strategy and the detail in which those thoughts are revealed. It is interesting to note that the two novels which display the most intense psychological realism, The Land of Plenty and Studs Lonigan, achieve it through the conscious artifice of the writers'
techniques. The reader is distanced from Cantwell's characters and from Studs in ways that he is not from Mike Gold and Larry Donovan, and this distance allows greater insight into characters' minds. In this respect the practice of the Proletarian novel appears to violate Hicks' contention that intensity is a function of the writer's conviction, not of his technique.

The other requirement of a Proletarian writer's treatment of the class struggle subject was that he convey a sense of revolutionary optimism. Again, there is variation among the four novels, both in the degree or quality of the revolutionary optimism and in the method used to communicate it. In *The Land of Plenty* revolutionary optimism is equivocated. Strongly present at the end of Part One when the workers feel their first sure sense of strength, it is cast into doubt by the end of the novel, so that the reader is left uncertain as to the future, not only of this particular strike but of the revolution itself. By the end of the novel Johnny Hagen has undergone severe dislocation and reorientation in a matter of weeks. He has seen his myths of the pattern of success destroyed, he has glimpsed the enormity of the array of forces capital can muster against the workers, he has seen the agents of capitalist repression--the police, joined by newspaper reporters--beat his fellow workers, including his girl friend. He has been beaten himself, and he has learned that his father has been shot. It is hard to imagine such a young man keeping his eyes raised to the promise of the coming
proletarian dawn. No doubt many young strikers, perhaps even newly-class-conscious ones like Johnny, unaware, like Johnny, in the middle of class battles, of communist ideology's assurance that the workers had the support of history, would be confused and lack a sense of revolutionary optimism. That notwithstanding, the Proletarian writer was supposed to be imbued with revolutionary optimism himself and endow his novels with it. Having written the book he has written up to the ending, Cantwell could conclude it in revolutionary optimism only by violating his novel's integrity and realism. According to doctrinaire Leftist theoretical criticism, revolutionary optimism was an element of "socialist realism," not mere wishful thinking but a gratuity of the dialectic. The Land of Plenty appears to violate this understanding.

The other three novels, however, do not. The Disinherited ends in stock revolutionary optimism, with the proletarian hero riding off into the revolutionary sunset, blood warmed by the thrill of newly-demonstrated solidarity and eyes brightened by the challenge of the future. Such projection of the Proletarian novel's plot into the future, beyond the limits of the novel itself, is what revolutionary optimism was all about, and the conversion novel pattern is aptly suited to supplying it. There is some dispute among critics and reviewers as to the extent to which the revolutionarily optimistic ending of The Disinherited comes naturally from the events of the novel, as we shall see below, but none deny that the requisite optimism is present. In Jews Without Money, revolutionary
optimism is also undeniably present. In fact it has all the qualities of the conviction of salvation that comes of a religious conversion, including the rush of surprise in the midst of despair that gives Gold's conversion its particular punch. Unlike The Disinherited, the revolutionary optimism of Jews Without Money does not come as the logical conclusion of plot pattern, since the novel is virtually plotless to begin with. Such logic is not needed in this novel because its major motif is resolved in Gold's worship of the "Workers' Revolution" as the "true Messiah" and because the suddenness with which Gold's apprehension of the revolutionary message comes, rending asunder the curtain of gloom that has fallen over him, catapults Gold and the reader into the revolutionary future.

In Studs Lonigan revolutionary optimism is implicit in the operation of the materialist dialectic. As Studs is lying home dying, he and the bourgeois capitalist culture he represents are at the logical end of their degeneracy. As Paddy Lonigan wanders dumbfoundedly through the streets wondering what has gone wrong, Farrell presents the antithesis of ignorance, helpless rage, and death in the workers' march. Judgment has indeed come for Studs and the bourgeoisie, and the quality of the future is indicated by the hopefulness, the healthiness, and the vigor of the marching proletarians. Something of this sort is necessary at the end of Studs Lonigan, especially given the book's length and the unrelieved gloom of the final volume. The reader may take
satisfaction in seeing Studs collapse and die at last; the reader may even infer revolutionary optimism through the operation of historic justice at last against him. Even so, whatever satisfaction is derived from Studs' suffering and his father's myopia is to some degree spiteful, hence negative and not truly satisfying. Something uplifting is needed if the reader is to come away from the novel with anything positive to mollify the torturous catharsis he has experienced in reading it. As Mike Gold had said, it would be revolutionary elan, not pessimism, that would "sweep this mess out of the world forever." Studs Lonigan in fact shares with Jews Without Money an important characteristic of the Marxist revolutionary vision. Both novels indicate the closeness of that vision to some forms of fundamentalist religion. Marxism sees the proletarian revolution as the apocalypse which will usher in the millennium. In both Gold's and Farrell's books, the coming revolution is heralded in Biblical terms--for Gold it is the "true Messiah," which he addresses as a deity in the manner of a Hebrew prayer, and for Farrell it is Judgment Day--and both suggest that the revolution will establish a brave new world of innocence and purity in contradistinction to the bourgeois world of sin and corruption.

Although they work toward the same ideological end, then, in terms of subject matter and treatment, the four Proletarian novels examined here differ widely from one another, and

7 Mike Gold, "Notes of the Month," New Masses, 6 (September, 1930), 5.
in some cases from what they were "supposed" to do according to the prescriptions of Leftist theoretical criticism. Accordingly, they met with varying receptions among contemporary Leftist critics. The more dogmatic and politically-oriented critics chastized any writer whose book was not obviously "revolutionary" in intent and directly educative in effect. According to the literary aesthetic that has dominated modern criticism, these critics often overrated the literary quality of Proletarian novels, linking that quality to the political commitment of the people who wrote them. Some Leftist critics, however, working from a position closer to the dominant modern aesthetic, evaluated Proletarian novels primarily in literary terms. Although they shared their utilitarian colleagues' assumption that good literature was made better if it showed Marxian insight, they were less willing to regard a novel's literary shortcomings as forgiveable in view of its author's political purpose. Apolitical modern criticism—especially the varieties of formalism that have flourished since the end of World War II—generally ignores an author's intention and concentrates on the literary work as an object. But as Booth points out, what began as an attempt to describe literature

has often hardened into a way of evaluating it. In the process "a loss of distinctions between levels of style suited to different literary kinds" has occurred. Consequently, didactic literature in general has fallen out of critical favor, and the Proletarian novel with its overt instrumental purpose is almost automatically excluded from the ranks of good literature. The following paragraphs will consider briefly each of the four novels examined in this study in terms of both its critical reception on the Left in the thirties and the prevailing modern critical attitude toward it.

The contemporary response to Jews Without Money was mixed. Its early reviewers found it insufficiently politically focused

9 Booth, The Rhetoric of Fiction, p. 35.

10 In Chapters II - V of The Rhetoric of Fiction, Booth surveys four "general rules" comprising the modern aesthetic of the novel. The first is that the novel must provide an intense illusion of reality. This is best accomplished by the removal of the author's voice from his narrative, something which some Proletarian writers were reluctant to do since it tends to make the communication of the author's values dependent on indirect literary means, thus increasing the risk that the reader will not derive the correct political understanding. The second rule is the demand for an author's moral objectivity or detachment regarding his created world, the very "above the battle" attitude that the Proletarian writers deplored. The third principle is the demand for the purity of art, its detachment from the world--again the kind of "mere aestheticism" anathema to the Proletarian writers, for whom art was a weapon. Finally, Booth cites the modern tendency toward the "dehumanization of art," in Ortega y Gasset's phrase, through the reduction of emotional impact on the reader. But the affective quality of literature was just what Proletarian writers counted on to teach the political lessons of their novels. Each of these four cardinal principles of modern aesthetics militates against the Proletarian novel.
in subject and treatment. Gold confused merely being poor with being proletarian, he failed to "write in terms of the mass, of whole classes of people caught up in the circumstances of their time, particularly the economic circumstances," and he neglected to document his account with references to early twentieth-century labor activities. A few years later, the editor and Communist Party member E. A. Schachner wrote a long appraisal of the condition of "Revolutionary Literature in the United States Today" in which he accused Gold of sacrificing revolutionary pointedness to romanticism, so that "the net result of [Jews Without Money] is to project a romantic glamor around the very poverty and suffering that Gold is interested in eradicating." Since Gold had "moved far to the left" after the publication of Jews Without Money, Schachner was confident that "future novels... will reflect his increasing understanding of the revolutionary movement," and he suggested Gold's errors not obscure his "pioneer effort in the revolutionary novel."  

Schachner also praised, in passing, Gold's "vivid, colorful, dramatic prose" which he said was as yet unsurpassed by any revolutionary novelist, but it was left for Granville Hicks to address the literary aspects of Jews Without Money in any detail. Hicks cited it several times as an


example in his series on "Revolution and the Novel" which ran in the New Masses in April and May of 1934. As other commentators had done by implication if not by statement, Hicks lauded Gold's intentions while faulting his execution. He warned that narrating a novel from the point of view of a central character may "prevent the author from making a comprehensive revelation of his own perceptions," but he found Jews Without Money a "success" in this method because of the "unusual sensitiveness [to political realities] of the narrator-author."

Aside from that, however, Hicks thought the novel "more successful in [its] depiction of characteristic events in a worker's life than . . . in describing the kind of psychological development that results in class-consciousness." The result was that "the hero's enlisting in the revolutionary cause comes without sufficient preparation" so that the process of development of class-consciousness was not "clear to the reader."

The modern objectivist critic, not concerned with evaluating the success of the novel as a political exemplum or with saluting Gold for his stature as a Leftist literary figure, would probably condemn Jews Without Money on several grounds. He would encourage the very narrative method--using the point of view of a limited, dramatized narrator--that Hicks had

13 Hicks, "Revolution and the Novel," in Robbins, p. 49.
14 ibid., pp. 42-43.
15 ibid., p. 48.
cautioned against. In this regard, Rideout's remark that *Jews Without Money* is to Coleridge's "fancy" as *Call It Sleep*--a Proletarian novel formally better suited to modern tastes--is to the "imagination" is revealing. The direct commentary that Gold employs to attach political significance to the events he describes would also be condemned according to the criterion of realism; such "intrusions" violate the illusion of reality which depends upon the novelist's absence. The passage from the novel cited in Chapter III, where Gold comments directly on the symbolic meaning of Louis One-Eye's pigeons, is a typical example of what the modern critical sensibility would consider heavy-handed, if not clumsy, and lowbrow writing. As far as the novelist's objectivity is concerned, even a modern apologist for Gold, Michael Brewster Folsom, finds the "sentimentality" of his apostrophe to "Momma" in Chapter Twelve to be "egregious." He also calls the closing passage of the novel about Mike's conversion "unsatisfying" because "regardless of its factual truth, Gold relies upon rhetoric, leaving us to take him on faith, rather than upon the patient narrative and self-examination which would allow us to credit his experience implicitly."

However true that may be, the tendency of modern objectivist

---

16 Rideout, p. 187.


18 *ibid.*, p. 239.
critics to overlook Jews Without Money fosters an ignorance of the unity in the novel provided by the Messiah motif. As Folsom says, that motif is a "tough nut, which more critics spit out than crack." The presence of that motif does not by itself make Jews Without Money great literature, but it does lend the novel more literary worth by their own standards than most modern critics are willing to grant.

Jack Conroy's The Disinherited also came in for mixed reviews by the literary Left. Granville Hicks' discussion of the weaknesses in psychological realism and insight in the Proletarian conversion novel cited The Disinherited as well as Jews Without Money. Hicks thought the shortcomings of Conroy's book, whose "climax ... does not seem to follow irresistibly from the progress of the narrative," should be pointed out also to counteract misinterpretations by "a number of bourgeois critics" who thought that Conroy himself did not recommend militancy. Hicks admitted that the lack of thematic unity and directness in The Disinherited made such a reading "superficially plausible," although anyone who knew Jack Conroy knew that he "recommend[ed] militancy to all workers."

E. A. Schachner found similar fault with The Disinherited, arguing that its effectiveness was hobbled by Conroy's eschewal of "introspection as if it were a bourgeois plague introduced into the western world by James Joyce [and] more averse to direct statement than any Philadelphia lawyer." The material

19 Granville Hicks, rev. of The Disinherited, Partisan Review, 1 (February-March, 1934), 56.
was there, Schachner said, but Conroy's "method of expression is . . . prodigal" with it, preventing it from "integrating into a unified whole." Schachner thought these faults revealed the "inability of the primitivist technique to more than sketch the shadow of a narrative," but The Disinherited was celebrated elsewhere on the Left for its very primitivism. Conroy himself, like Larry Donovan the son of the Missouri coalfields, was thought to be the incarnation of the ideal Proletarian writer. He fit Mike Gold's 1929 description of that writer nearly to a T. Some reviewers of The Disinherited praised it for its authenticity--Hicks said that it "makes us realize . . . what America actually means to the average working man"--and for its "movement and variety, . . . drive and indignation," qualities which distinguish it from drily effete and arty bourgeois writing. Schachner also called it a "stirring, often powerful novel" with which "Conroy takes a position in the top rank of younger revolutionary writers." But James T. Farrell dissented, and in doing so fired one of the first shots at what Phillips and Rahv were later to call the "leftist" position in radical criticism. Farrell dismissed

20 Schachner, p. 62.
21 see above, Chapter II, p. 68.
22 Hicks, rev. of The Disinherited, p. 56.
24 Schachner, p. 62.
Conroy's sincerity and authenticity as "[in]sufficient for the purpose of a novel," and condemned *The Disinherited* on literary rather than political grounds, from the standpoint of aesthetics rather than utility. "Literature," he said, "demands re-creation." The *Disinherited* was "satisfactory" only "as reporting. . . . As a novel it is superficial. [Conroy] has described many things. He has re-created almost nothing." 

Modern critics are likely to evaluate *The Disinherited* pretty much the way Farrell did in 1933, perhaps praising the verisimilitude of its descriptions of work and workers while noting its "obvious literary weakness," as Daniel Aaron does in his introduction to the Hill and Wang American Century series paperback. Aaron cites these weaknesses--"its awkwardly hitched episodes, its flat and undeveloped characterization, its pat conclusion"--but he treats it otherwise sympathetically as a living document of Depression times. *The Disinherited* does merit preservation, but it clearly lacks literary distinction.

As noted in Chapter III, Robert Cantwell confessed to having trouble with the ending of *The Land of Plenty*, a matter which Granville Hicks referred to in his comments on the

---


26 ibid., p. 715.

27 Aaron's comments are found on p. xii. This edition of *The Disinherited* was cited above, Chapter III, p. 124, n. 18, as the one in use in this study.
novel. When he reviewed it on its first appearance, before Cantwell's admission was made public, Hicks observed that "The Land of Plenty fails to sweep the reader along . . . to a high resolve and a sense of ultimate triumph": it lacked revolutionary optimism. After Cantwell's comment was published, Hicks cited the novel's problematical ending in support of his contention that the writer had to be "more than an observer of the class struggle" if he was to lend his work doctrinal correctness. Still, Hicks felt that Cantwell should be lauded for his success in The Land of Plenty, rather than censured for his failure. Accordingly, he praised Cantwell for his "shrewd and sound selection" overall and his extremely relevant subject matter, and he called the first part of the novel "the finest piece of imaginative writing the revolutionary movement in America has produced." John Dos Passos also reviewed The Land of Plenty and praised it for its relevancy and its effect. It was relevant, he said, because Cantwell appeared to have discovered "a method of coping with machinery," which Dos Passos said was "among the most important tasks before novelists today." Therefore


29 Hicks, "Revolutionary Literature of 1934," in Robbins, p. 277.

30 ibid., pp. 276-77.

if one wished to give "a visitor from Mars or Moscow" an idea of the situation in the United States in mid-1934, he could not choose a better book than The Land of Plenty. As to its effect, Dos Passos said, "it is written with a deadly devastating accuracy that takes the heart out of you, but when you finish it you know more than you did when you began it."

Walter Rideout says The Land of Plenty is "the best from most points of view" of the sixteen Proletarian strike novels. When it was reprinted in 1971 for the Southern Illinois University Press Crosscurrents/Modern Fiction series, Harry T. Moore noted in his preface Cantwell's interest in applying Henry James's narrative methods to Proletarian materials. Moore said that "in The Land of Plenty, Robert Cantwell showed that a novel about the working class didn't necessarily have to be lacking in literary distinction" and noted "here and there the influence of Henry James" in the text. For most modern critics a novelist's assimilation of Jamesian techniques constitutes a Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval, and indeed The Land of Plenty holds the most aesthetic interest for today of any of the novels included in this study because of its combination of political subject and theme with formal complexity.

I have argued above that James T. Farrell's Studs Lonigan

32 Rideout, p. 174.
33 Moore's comments are found on pp. x and xi. This edition of The Land of Plenty was cited above, Chapter III, p. 146, n. 22, as the one in use in this study.
offers the most indirect presentation of Marxist ideas of the four novels included in this study. This indirection earned Farrell the censure of Leftist critics who thought he failed to use his art as a weapon. Granville Hicks thought The Young Manhood of Studs Lonigan "pretty much disregard[ed] the insights Marxism can give into the psychology of the petty bourgeois" when he reviewed it at the beginning of 1935. Moreover, Hicks criticized The Young Manhood for some of the same faults that Farrell had found in The Disinherited. He said that "Farrell's novel comes to seem a mere transcript of observations, almost without proportion or emphasis." But where Farrell had found fault with Conroy on literary grounds, Hicks traced the literary problems of The Young Manhood to ideology. For Hicks, the novel not only dealt with "marginal themes," it did so "in a marginal fashion." It needed "greater unity, . . . better proportioning, and a sharper truer emphasis." None of these qualities could be achieved through Farrell's whetting his talent; they could "come only through deeper understanding, and that is something Communism can give. . . ." In the case of E. A. Schachner, an attack on Farrell on ideological grounds indicates a misreading of the novel. Schachner lambasted Farrell for "apparently laboring under the delusion that the formula for writing a proletarian novel is to describe the denizens of a half-dozen pool

34 Hicks, "Revolutionary Literature in 1934," in Robbins, p. 275.

35 ibid., pp. 275-76.
parlors, saloons, and brothels, then add one crack-brained foreigner who spouts Marx, Bakunin, and Henry George [Christy, the waiter at the Greek restaurant in The Young Manhood, actually as Irish as the next character], and finally distill the mixture into a bottle labelled 'Dreiser plus Dos Passos.'" Schachner called Farrell's characters "the most corrupted members of the working class--lumpenproletarians," when they are clearly petty bourgeois. Apparently his anger at Farrell's failure to show "revolutionary consciousness" through the first two volumes of Studs Lonigan blinded him to this fact. 36

After the publication of Judgment Day with its implications of Farrell's faith in the proletarian future, however, Studs Lonigan seemed doctrinally correct. Hicks noted with approval Farrell's apparent shift to the left. 37 Robert Cantwell also praised the trilogy in its entirety though he had not liked the three volumes as they appeared separately. Taken as a whole, the trilogy gave "a pattern to the monotony of the individual episodes" so that the novel had "a cumulative impact of power and intensity." 38 Other reviewers considered the novel in more strictly literary terms. One, for instance, observed that "by artful suggestion" Farrell

---

36 All citations of Schachner in this paragraph are from "Revolutionary Literature in the United States Today," p. 64.


had made Studs "the symbol of an era and a class." 

Kenneth Burke wrote a perceptive essay on Studs Lonigan upon the appearance of Judgment Day, an essay in which he appreciated Farrell's analysis of "the drastically anti-social amalgam" resulting "when run-down capitalism and religious conformism are put together" as well as the "tough, fluent lingo" in which the novel was written. According to Burke's reading, Farrell "shows most poignantly, at times even terrifyingly, how the religious emphases, at least as manipulated by average priests under capitalist conditions, make spontaneously for moral disorganization through their very vocabulary of virtue." In addition to his attraction to this theme, Burke's review indicates his engagement with the novel on the grounds of such qualities as its "irony" and "paradox," qualities which suggest Farrell's literary enrichment of his political subject. The New York Times reviewer, Harold Strauss, found similar qualities in Studs Lonigan, so that it became the exceptional proletarian novel:

While the acceptance of the Marxist analysis has stifled other novelists, it has given Farrell's work greater depth and significance. His accurate records of street life previously were informative but not moving. Now the concept of the class struggle has provided him with the


dynamics he needs, and his past training is anchoring him against the ebb tide of wishful thinking that has wrecked so many other proletarian novelists. 41

Outside of contemporary reviews in both moderate and Leftist journals, *Studs Lonigan* has attracted the most critical attention of any of the four Proletarian novels studied here, and the most of all Proletarian novels, unless Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* is included among them. But the bulk of the critical attention focuses on other aspects than the novel's Proletarianism. It is both studied as a work of naturalism and dismissed from further serious consideration as a mere specimen of naturalism. It may be that the naturalist and Marxist world views under which *Studs Lonigan* was written no longer speak to our sensibilities, and that the novel therefore lacks the universality that would give it endurance.

But there is an undeniable power to the novel, and a morbid fascination results from the accuracy of Farrell's rendering of the psychology of Studs, his family, and peers, as if one has overturned an old board to reveal the appallingly charming world of crawling insects.

Finally, a study of the phenomenon of the Proletarian literary movement and the novels it produced must attempt an assessment in terms of the ongoing American literary tradition. In the 1930's, there was an ambivalence among many

writers and critics on the Left about that tradition. The place of works of the bourgeois past in the proletarian culture was a matter of continuing debate, and that culture was to be international in character according to Marxism and "Third Period" Communism. But even Michael Gold, an unquestioning party man and certainly no WASP American, spoke of American Proletarian literature in terms of the native tradition. Nowadays, the rather ingenuous aesthetics of the Proletarian movement, for instance its insistence on revolutionary optimism, seem less like Marxism than secularized American Protestant sermonizing. Occasionally, a Leftist literary figure would reveal a two-fisted Americanism when he discussed the subject of Proletarian literature. John Dos Passos responded to a questionnaire distributed to various writers and critics by V. F. Calverton in 1932, specifically to a question about the "near possibility of a proletarian literature in America" by saying America had had "a proletarian literature for years," unlike other countries. "It hasn't been a revolutionary literature, exactly," he said, "though . . . Walt Whitman's a hell of a lot more revolutionary than any Russian poet I've ever heard of." Dos Passos went on to say that "Marxians who attempt to junk the American tradition . . . are cutting themselves off from the continent. Somebody's got to have the size to Marxianize the American tradition before you sell the American worker on the social revolution. Or else Americanize Marx." Likewise, Edmund

42 John Dos Passos, "Whither the American Writer?"
Wilson wrote a year later that

> if it is a question of the use in literature of the popular life and language, the nation which has produced "Leaves of Grass" and "Huckleberry Finn" has nothing to learn from Russia or any other country, either in the use of the common language or in the expression of the dignity and importance of the common man. Our pioneers had created a literature of the common man's escape from bourgeois society long before the Russian masses were beginning to learn to write their names.\(^{43}\)

Dos Passos and Wilson may have been engaged in some revisionist literary history in light of the political sympathies they felt at the respective times of their remarks, but indeed the character of the Proletarian literary movement in the thirties and of the literature the movement encouraged was peculiarly American. I have noted in Chapter I the Proletarian movement's links to both the social criticism of much of American letters in the 1920's and the thought of Emerson and Whitman in the nineteenth century. To recapitulate and expand some of that now, the Proletarian literary movement, first of all, envisioned a role for the writer markedly similar to that adumbrated by Emerson in "The American Scholar" and by Whitman in "Democratic Vistas" of the man of letters in a democracy; he would appear from among the people and articulate their feelings, hopes, and ambitions,

\(^{43}\) Edmund Wilson, "Art, the Proletariat and Marx," *New Republic*, 23 August 1933, p. 43.
thereby helping to shape and give coherence to the national culture. Moreover, Whitman's vision of democratic America in particular resembled the Marxist vision of a classless society. In both, men were to be valued for their intrinsic worth and their cooperative labor; neither attached worth to the non-productive, parasitic owning classes. Traces of a Whitmanesque sensibility show up in the Proletarian novel—in the sympathetic portrayals of anonymous or average working men and women in Jews Without Money, The Disinherited, and The Land of Plenty. Such people are indeed "dumb, beautiful ministers" for Gold, Conroy, and Cantwell. Also, the novels present aspects of Emersonian romanticism despite the avowals of strict rationalism and scientism on the part of the Proletarian literary movement's theorists. As the discussion of proletarian characters above indicates, they were usually portrayed as salt-of-the-earth types. While The Grapes of Wrath is no doubt the archetypal expression of this view, each of the three novels with proletarian heroes presents them as possessing a basic virtue associated with their humble simplicity. The fact that they are often corruptible by the world, i.e., bourgeois capitalism, testifies to their crude innocence. The Disinherited further shows the characteristic American anti-intellectualism, whose roots are in the Emersonian elevation of intuition over reason, in the figure of Ed Warden, acting as the reader's friend and a reliable and down-to-earth check on Larry's abstract theorizing early in the novel's third section. Similarly, the Emersonian
doctrine of self-reliance and the intuitive apprehension of truth is evident in Mike Gold's portrait of his mother as a proletarian heroine, particularly in the episode where her "dark proletarian instincts" help her to uncover the mushrooms in Bronx Park. This scene is also one of several in the novel that suggest parallels to the twentieth-century romantic—and sometime fellow-traveler—Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio*. In addition to their kinship with the American romantic figures Emerson and Whitman, the Proletarian writers share the heritage of the American realist tradition founded by Howells, Garland, and Norris. Those nineteenth-century writers' emphasis on the social function of realism and documentarianism is directly progenitive of the Proletarian novelists' emphasis on facts and surface details to speak for themselves of a deeper, and often sordid, reality in the lives of both proletarians and bourgeois. Also, the Proletarian novel belongs in a long line of protest fiction that pervades the second level of achievement in American literature, but which should not be ignored on that account. This tradition stretches from Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and Melville's *White-Jacket* through Sinclair's *The Jungle* and London's *The Iron Heel*, Caldwell's *Tobacco Road* and Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* to Styron's *The Confessions of Nat Turner* and Mailer's *Armies of the Night*.

In a more profound way as well as in such particulars as these, the Proletarian novel evokes the characteristic American sensibility. In none of the novels examined here is
a specific or doctrinaire Marxist revolution depicted. What is shown—and what the reader is to appreciate—is the liberation of humanistic values. In one way or another, the novels suggest Mike Gold's formulation of "a world made gracious for the poor," the possibility of the establishment of "a garden for the human spirit." This figure reveals the understanding the Proletarian novelists shared with various dreamers and chroniclers of the American Dream, that somehow the American continent would yield another Eden, enabling man to transcend time and history within history and live forever in democratic pastoral peace, with the machine and with himself. Reflecting on the Proletarian movement, one is struck by the applicability to the writers on the Left of Fitzgerald's description of the archetypal American vision at the end of The Great Gatsby. The Proletarian writers, faced in the early 1930's with what seemed the imminent collapse of decadent and soulless American capitalism, gazed themselves at the "green breast of [a] new world" in the proletarian revolution, and that gracious world surely must have seemed somehow "commensurate to [their] capacity for wonder." Like Gatsby, like the "Dutch sailor," like all those who pursue the green light at the end of some dock, the Proletarian writers did not realize how it ever receded before them. Their attempt to realize the ideal gave us the Proletarian novel, which sparked for a moment in spontaneous intensity, then was smothered again by the more plodding forces of politics and history.
Bibliography

Primary Sources

Books


Articles

"Are Artists People?" New Masses, 2 (January, 1927), 5-9.

"Authors' Field Day: A Symposium on Marxist Criticism." New Masses, 3 July 1934, pp. 27-32.


"Can We Have a Proletarian Literature?" Modern Quarterly, 6 (Autumn, 1932), 39-50.


"Leftward, Ho!" Modern Quarterly, 6 (Summer, 1932), 26-32.


"Whither the American Writer?" Modern Quarterly, 6 (Summer, 1932), 11-19.


Gold, Mike. "Go Left, Young Writers!" New Masses, 4 (January, 1929), 3-4.
"Let It Be Really New." New Masses, 1 (June, 1926), 20 and 26.


"Notes of the Month." New Masses, 5 (January, 1930), 6-7.

"Notes of the Month." New Masses, 6 (August, 1930), 3-5.

"Notes of the Month." New Masses, 6 (September, 1930), 4-6.


Hicks, Granville. "The Crisis in American Criticism." New Masses, 8 (February, 1933), 5-14.


Rahv, Philip. "The Literary Class War." New Masses, 8 (August, 1932), 3-10.


Secondary Sources

Books


### Articles


Vita

Joel Dudley Wingard was born October 18, 1946, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He was educated in the Pittsburgh public schools and graduated from high school there in 1964. He received a B.A. from Muskingum College, New Concord, Ohio, in 1968 and served one semester as a graduate teaching assistant in English at Eastern Kentucky University before entering the United States Navy in 1969. He served as an enlisted journalist until his release at the end of 1972. While in the Navy he resumed his graduate studies at Old Dominion University and took an M.A. there in 1973. He taught high school English in Suffolk, Virginia, in 1973-74 before becoming a graduate teaching assistant in English at Louisiana State University. He served in that capacity for three years and was appointed instructor of English in 1977. After serving two years as instructor, he accepted a position as assistant professor at Doane College, Crete, Nebraska. He married Karla Morales of Baton Rouge, Louisiana, in April, 1979.

He is a member of the Modern Language Association, the South Central Modern Language Association, and the South Atlantic Modern Language Association.
EXAMINATION AND THESIS REPORT

Candidate: Joel Dudley Wingard

Major Field: English

Title of Thesis: TOWARD A WORKERS' AMERICA:
THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF
THE AMERICAN PROLETARIAN NOVEL,
BASED UPON FOUR SELECTED WORKS

Approved:

[Signatures]

Major Professor and Chairman

Dean of the Graduate School

EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

[Signatures]

Nicholas Canaday

[Signatures]

Max Welch

Date of Examination:

May 15, 1979