

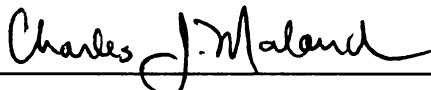
To the Graduate Council:

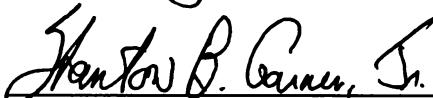
I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Walter Squire entitled "The Aesthetic Diversity of American Proletarian Fiction." I have examined the final copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in English.

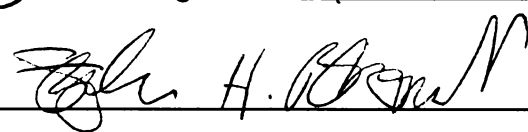


Mary E. Papke, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation
and recommend its acceptance:







Accepted for the Council:



Vice Provost and
Dean of Graduate Studies

THE AESTHETIC DIVERSITY OF AMERICAN PROLETARIAN FICTION

A Dissertation
Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy
Degree
University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Walter Squire
December 2001

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

There are many students and faculty members to whom I am grateful for their advice and suggestions. I would like to thank George Hutchinson for reading early chapters of this dissertation and Dorothy Scura for introducing me to the work of Olive Tilford Dargan. I am particularly grateful to my Dissertation Committee, Stephen Blackwell, Stan Garner, and Chuck Maland, for their guidance and support. The director of this dissertation, Mary Papke, deserves special recognition for her infinite patience, encouragement, and enthusiasm throughout this entire project.

Through the generous support of the Durant da Ponte American Literature Fellowship, I was able to conduct important research at the John Dos Passos Collection at the University of Virginia Library, the Margaret I. King Library at the University of Kentucky, and the Southern Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Numerous librarians at these institutions were extraordinarily helpful. I would like to thank the English Department and the John C. Hodges Library at the University of Tennessee for the purchase of the *Liberator* and *Modern Quarterly*, as these journals were essential to my research.

I would also like to recognize my family and friends, and especially my mother, for the constant faith in my abilities that provided me the necessary motivation to continue when my self-confidence wavered. Finally, I owe the greatest debt to Allison. Without her love I would never have been able to complete this project.

ABSTRACT

Almost as soon as a certain movement in early twentieth-century American literature began to be labeled "proletarian," numerous literary critics defined the genre as propagandistic, formulaic, and prescribed by a hegemonic and totalitarian American Communist Party. Recently, scholars of 1930s leftist literature have challenged previous dismissals of proletarianism by noting the diversity of participants and the complexity of individual works. Frequently, however, too much emphasis is placed upon the Communist Party, shared political and literary projects, and temporal parameters, all of which would suggest that proletarianism was an isolated phenomenon within the history of American literature.

This study reveals that the major proponents of American proletarian literature portrayed the movement as the successor to progressive and radical tendencies throughout the history of American literature. Furthermore, during the 1930s proletarianism was a term open to debate, one whose advocates presented vastly different definitions. Similarly, those novelists whom contemporary critics most often labeled "proletarian," although they shared a support of labor and socialism, utilized disparate and frequently experimental techniques and held varied positions toward the Communist Party.

Beginning with Vernon Louis Parrington, during the 1920s and 1930s a series of literary historians traced a lineage of radical American literature that culminated in the proletarian writers of their own era. In *Jews Without Money*, Michael Gold's

gestures toward American literary heritage, as well as toward Shakespeare and modernist movements, bring to light subtleties and complexities in the novel that might otherwise be overlooked. Whereas Parrington, Gold, and others developed singular lines of descent for proletarian literature that might suggest that proletarianism is homogenous in form, the novels based upon the 1929 Loray Mill strike in Gastonia, North Carolina, reveal that proletarian novelists employed diverse techniques. Finally, John Dos Passos's *U.S.A.* trilogy demonstrates a search for new literary forms that can elucidate the effects of capitalism more effectively than those genres which already exist. The innovations of *U.S.A.* indicate that proletarianism was not a genre but a political commitment, and the parameters of proletarianism can be extended easily to include a wide variety of literary forms and techniques.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1:

The Emergence of American Proletarian Literature: Three Hypotheses	1
Hypothesis One: The Economic Crisis	8
Hypothesis Two: The Influence of Theory	13
Hypothesis Three: The Proletarian Usable Past	42

CHAPTER 2:

Michael Gold	60
"When I think it is the tenement thinking": Towards Experiential Art	62
The Class and Gender Divisions of Literary Labor	75
Influences	101
The Synthesis of Old and New World Ideologies	121

CHAPTER 3:

The Gastonia Novels	131
Reportage and the Radicalization of the Middle Class	136
The Historical Novel and Proletarian Class Consciousness	146
Class Consciousness as Perpetual Struggle	158
Towards a Panoramic Proletarian Novel	169

CHAPTER 4:

<i>U.S.A.</i>	186
Proletarianism and Modernism	187
Dialectical History	196
Social Autobiography	211

CONCLUSION	227
----------------------	-----

WORKS CITED	235
-----------------------	-----

VITA	259
----------------	-----

CHAPTER 1

The Emergence of American Proletarian Literature: Three Hypotheses

Describing the proletarian novel in 1981, Stanley Aronowitz claimed:

A new genre of execrable "proletarian" novels was born in the early 1930s fostered to a large extent by [Michael] Gold and the Communist party. This was the novel of struggle, in which friends and enemies were clearly defined, where the outcome was predictable if the reader understood the formula, and resembled the Communist version of pulp fiction. (Aronowitz 235)

Although Aronowitz's characterization of the proletarian novel was once conventional among critics of American literature, a renewed interest in left-wing American literature of the 1930s during the past two decades, resulting in an exposure of that literature's intricacies, has rendered untenable the argument that proletarian writers perpetually reiterated a prescribed model.

While a few studies of early twentieth-century American left-wing literature were published from the 1950s through the 1970s,¹ beginning in the 1980s a

¹ For instance, see Walter B. Rideout, *The Radical Novel in the United States, 1900-1954: Some Interrelations of Literature and Society* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1956); Daniel Aaron, *Writers on the Left: Episodes in American Literary Communism* (1961; New York: Columbia UP, 1992); James Burkhart Gilbert, *Writers and Partisans: A History of Literary Radicalism in America* (New York: Wiley, 1968); David Madden, ed., *Proletarian Writers of the Thirties* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1968); Melvin Landsberg, *Dos Passos' Path to U.S.A.: A Political Biography*

multitude of texts have appeared which re-examine 1930s proletarianism.² In

1912-1936 (Boulder: Colorado Associated UP, 1972); Richard H. Pells, *Radical Visions and American Dreams: Culture and Social Thought in the Depression Years* (New York: Harper, 1973); and John Pyros, *Michael Gold: Dean of American Proletarian Writers* (New York: Dramatikon, 1979). In addition to these critical works, see the following anthologies of 1930s journalism, literature, and literary theory: Samuel Sillen, ed., *The Mike Gold Reader: From the Writings of Michael Gold* (New York: International, 1954); Jack Salzman and Barry Wallenstein, eds., *Years of Protest: A Collection of American Writings of the 1930's* (New York: Pegasus, 1967); Joseph North, ed., *New Masses: An Anthology of the Rebel Thirties* (New York: International, 1969); Daniel Aaron and Robert Bendiner, eds., *The Strenuous Decade: A Social and Intellectual Record of the 1930s*, Documents in American Civilization (Garden City: Doubleday, 1970); Michael Folsom, ed., *Mike Gold: A Literary Anthology* (New York: International, 1972); and Jack Alan Robbins, ed., *Granville Hicks in the New Masses* (Port Washington: Kennikat, 1974). Finally, David R. Peck's *American Marxist Literary Criticism: 1926-1941, A Bibliography* (New York: American Institute for Marxist Studies, 1975) presents an extensive bibliography of critics who participated in debates over proletarianism during the 1930s.

² Among the more important recent studies of the American literary left during the 1930s are Alan Wald, *James T. Farrell: The Revolutionary Socialist Years* (New York: New York UP, 1978); Robert C. Rosen, *John Dos Passos: Politics and the Writer* (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1981); Ralph F. Bogardus and Fred Hobson, eds., *Literature at the Barricades: The American Writer in the 1930s* (Tuscaloosa: U of Alabama P, 1982); Alan Wald, *The Revolutionary Imagination: The Poetry of John Wheelwright and Sherry Mangan* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1983); Eric Homberger, *American Writers and Radical Politics, 1900-1939: Equivocal Commitments* (New York: Macmillan, 1986); Dee Garrison, *Mary Heaton Vorse: The Life of an American Insurgent* (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1989); Cary Nelson, *Repression and Recovery: Modern American Poetry and the Politics of Cultural Memory* (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1989); James F. Murphy, *The Proletarian Moment: The Controversy over Leftism in Literature* (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1991); Paula Rabinowitz, *Labor and Desire: Women's Revolutionary Fiction in Depression America* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1991); James D. Bloom, *Left Letters: The Cultural Wars of Mike Gold and Joseph Freeman* (New York: Columbia UP, 1992); John Patrick Diggins, *The Rise and Fall of the American Left* (New York: Norton, 1992); Barbara Foley, *Radical Representations: Politics and Form in U.S. Proletarian Fiction, 1929-1941* (Durham: Duke UP, 1993); H. Lark Hall, *V. L. Parrington: Through the Avenue of Art* (Kent: Kent State UP, 1994); Douglas Wixson, *Worker-Writer in America: Jack Conroy and the Tradition of Midwestern Literary Radicalism, 1898-1990* (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1994); Constance Coiner,

addition, numerous radical novels of the 1930s have been republished.³ Although recent criticism on 1930s literature has complicated and contested the work of previous historians of this period, definitions and parameters of the term "proletarian" remain largely unquestioned.⁴ As James T. Farrell pointed out in 1936,⁵ "proletarian," when applied to literature or other arts, is not a transparent and singular term but gestures toward many possible criteria. Among these criteria are authorship, audience, subject matter, perspective, class consciousness, and intent or purpose. In other words, is a proletarian work one which is written *by* a member of the proletariat, one written *for* and/or read by members of the proletariat, one written *about* the proletariat, or one written *from* the perspective of members of the proletariat? Furthermore, does it matter whether this proletariat is class-conscious or remains under the sway of capitalist ideology? That is, must a proletarian work

Better Red: The Writing and Resistance of Tillie Olsen and Meridel Le Sueur (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1995); Christina Looper Baker, *In a Generous Spirit: A First-Person Biography of Myra Page* (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1996); Bill Mullen and Sherry Lee Linkon, eds., *Radical Revisions: Rereading 1930s Culture* (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1996); Laura Browder, *Rousing the Nation: Radical Culture in Depression America* (Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1998); and M. Keith Booker, *The Modern American Novel of the Left: A Research Guide* (Westport: Greenwood, 1999).

³ In addition to individual works reprinted by various publishers, two series have recovered several novels from obscurity: Omnigraphic's Proletarian Literature (Matthew J. Bruccoli and Richard Layman, seniors eds.) and U of Illinois P's The Radical Novel Reconsidered (Alan Wald, series ed.).

⁴ One notable exception is Barbara Foley, who devotes a chapter of *Radical Representations*, "Defining Proletarian Literature," to examining various criteria for proletarian fiction furthered by 1930s critics.

⁵ See *A Note on Literary Criticism* (New York: Vanguard, 1936) 86-87.

promote class consciousness and revolutionary action? Farrell's taxonomy reveals the degree to which literary proletarianism was never coherently defined during the period of its most frequent usage, and numerous examples can be provided of arguments between critics about whether the text in question could be considered proletarian based upon its subject matter, explicit ideology, assumed effect upon readers, or the writer's economic class. For instance, Melvin P. Levy complained that Michael Gold's *Jews Without Money* could not be considered proletarian because its characters were not members of the proletariat, and Granville Hicks, while praising Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*, ultimately declared it not proletarian because Sinclair was not a member of the working class. On the other hand, whereas Edmund Wilson contended that John Dos Passos's work fell outside the parameters of proletarianism in that it primarily pertained to the middle-class, Hicks advocated recognition of Dos Passos as the finest example of an American proletarian writer. And, because its ideology is not explicit, reviewers of Olive Tilford Dargan's *Call Home the Heart* praised it for being both proletarian and anti-Communist, thus supposedly also anti-proletarian.⁶ There was, then, simply no agreement among 1930s literary theorists who attempted to define the term. V. F. Calverton, Waldo

⁶ See Melvin P. Levy, "Michael Gold," rev. of *Jews Without Money*, by Michael Gold, *The New Republic* 26 Mar. 1930: 159-61; Granville Hicks, *The Great Tradition: An Interpretation of American Literature since the Civil War* (New York: Macmillan, 1933) 196-203 and 287-92; Edmund Wilson, *The Triple Thinkers: Ten Essays on Literature* (New York: Harcourt, 1938) 282; V. J. Jerome, "Toward a Proletarian Novel," rev. of *Call Home the Heart*, by Fielding Burke [Olive Tilford Dargan], *New Masses* Aug. 1932: 14-15; and Jonathan Daniels, "Mill Town," rev. of *Call Home the Heart*, by Fielding Burke [Olive Tilford Dargan], *Saturday Review of Literature* 20 Feb. 1932: 537.

Frank, Michael Gold, and Edwin Seaver steadfastly maintained that the only criterion for proletarian writers is that they express a revolutionary ideology.⁷ In contrast, E. A. Schachner asserted that a proletarian work is solely dependent upon subject matter and "need not be more revolutionary than the proletariat itself is at the time the novel is written" (61, n. 1). Finally, other commentators insisted upon the dual criteria of ideological position and proletarian subject matter, as did Malcolm Cowley, who more narrowly defined proletarian works as those "written from the revolutionary point of view about working-class characters" ("What the Revolutionary" 59).

The lack of a universal and consistent definition of literary proletarianism has resulted in subsequent critics either rejecting the term outright⁸ or using it as a purely temporal description, the latter following the example of Walter B. Rideout, who identifies the proletarian novel as "the name by which the radical novel came to be universally known in the first half of the thirties" (*The Radical Novel* 165). Rideout

⁷ See V. F. Calverton, *The Liberation of American Literature* (New York: Scribner's, 1932) 461-62; Waldo Frank, "Values of the Revolutionary Writer," *American Writers' Congress*, ed. Henry Hart (New York: International, 1935): 71-78; Irwin Granich [Michael Gold], "Towards Proletarian Art," *Liberator* Feb. 1921: 20-24; and Edwin Seaver, "The Proletarian Novel," *American Writers' Congress* 98-103. Seaver's address to the American Writers' Congress of 1935 makes one of the clearest arguments for an ideological definition of proletarianism: "In all of these cases I think it is the present class loyalty of the author that is the determining factor, the political orientation of the novelist, and not the class origin, or the class portrayed" (101).

⁸ The novelist Josephine Herbst, in a letter to David Madden in which she declines to write an essay for *Proletarian Writers of Thirties*, opposes the use of "proletarian" as a descriptive label, for "proletarian was a narrow word, and part of the jargon. I do not believe that I can write anything for this project as, among other things, it starts off with a cliché" (qtd. in Madden xvii).

does distinguish the proletarian novel from the earlier "Socialist novel" of 1900-1919, noting that the proletarian novel advocated class warfare and disdained religion whereas "Socialist writers had expressly rejected violence" (169) and were "influenced by the 'New Theology' and the Social Gospel more than by Marx" (77-78), yet he does not provide examples of socialist, non-proletarian novels written during the thirties, and his appendix to *The Radical Novel*, "American Radical Novels" (292-300), reinforces an assumption that all radical novels written during the thirties were proletarian and that those written before or after that decade cannot be considered such.

Similarly, Barbara Foley offers a definition of proletarianism in terms of temporal parameters:

As I use it in this study, the term "U.S. proletarian fiction" refers to novels written in the ambience of the Communist-led cultural movement that arose and developed in the United States in the context of the Great Depression. One could, if one wanted, extend the temporal rubric of the term: arguably Rebecca Harding Davis's *Life in the Iron Mills* (1861), Jack London's *The Iron Heel* (1908), John Oliver Killens's *Youngblood* (1954), and Thomas McGrath's *This Coffin Has No Handles* (1984) are, in one sense or another, all "proletarian" novels. But none of the authors of these texts (except possibly McGrath, who has roots in 1930s literary radicalism) would have called himself or herself a "proletarian" writer. (*Radical*

Representations vii)

If historians of 1930s American literature do not firmly establish what separates a proletarian text from a non-proletarian one, they are a little clearer as to possible causes for the profusion of novels, and to a lesser degree plays and poetry, during the thirties which detail the deleterious effects of capitalism upon members of various economic classes and which advocate socialism as a solution. In this chapter I will examine the three most commonly cited causal factors for the emergence of proletarian literature which recur in studies of 1930s literature: the economic crisis brought on by the Great Depression; the influence of literary theorists who, in the words of Edmund Wilson, "attempt[ed] . . . to legislate masterpieces into existence" ("Marxism and Literature" 281); and a native tradition of American literature dating from the mid-nineteenth century forward which "promoted a class analysis of economic oppression and strengthened a thematics of concern for working-class conditions" (Nelson 135). Few critics subscribe to a single cause, and several fuse all three, yet most place more emphasis upon one cause than the others. Although I will scrutinize the work of a few representative critics, my intention is not to simplify their explanations for the explosion of economically centered literary texts during the 1930s but to outline the features and analyze the merit of each asserted cause. I will also restrict myself to those American and Soviet commentators who directly address proletarian literature. While any number of Marxist theorists would be useful in an examination of the relationship between literature and revolutionary action, there is a reason for their exclusion: American writers and critics affiliated with proletarianism,

for the most part, were unaware of developments in European Marxist aesthetic theory.⁹

Hypothesis One: The Economic Crisis

Certain critics consider the economic collapse leading to the Great Depression the single most important reason for proletarian literature's apparently sudden appearance, popularity, and subsequent demise. I will call this approach the "economic crisis" school after Alfred Kazin's allegation in *On Native Grounds* that economic conditions were the origin of the movement. According to Kazin, the Stock Market Crash of 1929 ushered in a decade of "contagious naturalism" of which proletarianism was one wing. What differentiated this naturalism from that of previous decades is that it was entirely economic. Whereas formerly the determinism of American naturalism represented a "philosophy of life," Depression-era naturalism exhibited "the determinism of the class struggle, the policeman's night stick, love without money, and the degradations of a society in which so many men were jobless and hungry" (372). While he concurs with Philip Rahv¹⁰ that "[t]he influence of Communism explains dozens of cheaply tendentious political novels" (378), Kazin maintains "that the tropism toward Communism represented only a symptom rather

⁹ For detailed evidence to support this claim, see Mary E. Papke, "An Analysis of Selected American Marxist Criticism, 1920-1941: From Dogma to Dynamic Strategies," *Minnesota Review* 13 (Fall 1979): 41-69.

¹⁰ See "Proletarian Literature: A Political Autopsy," *Southern Review* 4 (1939): 616-28, rpt. in *Essays on Literature and Politics, 1932-1972*, ed. Arabel J. Porter and Andrew J. Dvosin (Boston: Houghton, 1978) 293-304.

than cause" (378), for only "the disorganization and demoralization of the crisis period" (378) can explain the development of "a militant social literature" (377).

To support his argument that proletarianism was the effect of the Depression and not of communism, Kazin records the disinterest in Marxism and the absence of American radical literature during the 1920s, noting that the vibrant socialist literary output of Jack London, Upton Sinclair, Wobbly poets and songwriters, and publications such as *Masses* and *Liberator* "had been reduced in the twenties to the Marxist criticism of Michael Gold, V. F. Calverton, and Joseph Freeman" (374), all of whom Kazin characterizes as pedantic ideologues who "talked mostly to themselves" (374).

To some degree, David Madden and Barbara Foley reiterate Kazin's claim that the Great Depression was the primary cause of 1930s proletarianism. Madden begins his introduction to *Proletarian Writers of the Thirties* by asserting that proletarian literature was "[p]roduced by a 'crisis generation'" (xvi) and concludes by suggesting that the economic stability provided by the New Deal caused proletarianism's demise (xxxix). Although Barbara Foley places far more importance upon the effect that theorization had upon those who wrote proletarian works, she, too, acknowledges that the Great Depression was a primary factor in the formation of American proletarianism, for even in the absence of critical discussions regarding the need for literature to engage in economic critique, "no doubt some kind of left-wing literature would have sprung up in the U.S, as a response to Soviet socialist construction on the one hand and the 1930s economic crisis on the other" (44).

There are clear benefits of a strictly "economic crisis" approach to proletarianism for those who seek originating causes of the movement. First, the documentary record would seem to support Kazin's notion that the literature of the 1930s was obsessed with economics and the possibility of revolution more than that of any other decade.¹¹ Many of the most popular, or at least critically acclaimed, novels which depict capitalist-induced poverty, labor struggles, and impending revolution were produced within the years Foley treats in her book (1929-1941), among them Agnes Smedley's *Daughter of Earth* (1929), Michael Gold's *Jews Without Money* (1930), Mary Heaton Vorse's *Strike!* (1930), Jack Conroy's *The Disinherited* (1933), Josephine Herbst's *Pity Is Not Enough* (1933), Robert Cantwell's *The Land of Plenty* (1934), Henry Roth's *Call It Sleep* (1934), and John Steinbeck's *In Dubious Battle* (1936) and *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939). In addition, writers with leftist sympathies such as John Dos Passos and James T. Farrell produced their most notable work during this decade, and some writers with already established reputations, such as Sherwood Anderson and Olive Tilford Dargan, made

¹¹ According to Rideout, fifty out of a total of seventy proletarian novels were published between 1930 and 1935. These novels may represent an initial literary reaction to the Great Depression. Although Rideout would counsel against calling such a relatively small output "a genuine literary *movement*" (*The Radical Novel* 171), he does note that proletarian novels were "greater in quantity and more concentrated in time than the prewar Socialist output" (171). Additionally, one can debate Rideout's relatively restrictive listing of proletarian novels, for he does not consider the work of Dos Passos or Steinbeck proletarian, and he may have been unaware of lesser-known novels. For additional bibliographies of proletarian novels, consult Ken Kirkpatrick and Sidney F. Huttner, "Women Writers in the Proletarian Literature Collection, McFarlin Library," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 8.1 (Spring 1989): 143-53; and Foley, *Radical Representations* 5 n.4.

a turn toward the left. Similarly, although the term "proletarian literature" had been in use in the United States since at least 1921, when Michael Gold published "Towards Proletarian Art" in the *Liberator*, the late 1920s and 1930s saw a critical attention to its benefits or drawbacks to a higher degree than ever before or since.

Second, although one might expect to have seen proletarian works from the inception of the proletariat as an economic class, seemingly only an international economic crisis could serve to produce deepened class consciousness. For the proletariat, the crisis might disable the capitalist ideology to which they were subject, but the class which perhaps would gain the greatest class consciousness would be the middle class, those who had previously benefitted from capitalism but who were now confronted with its possible collapse. One must recognize that many so-called proletarian writers were actually from the middle class; further, the Depression so diminished the gap in economic experience between the proletariat and the middle class that Edwin Seaver saw no contradiction in middle-class novelists writing about their own milieu from a revolutionary or proletarian point of view.¹²

While the above arguments make the "economic crisis" approach seem self-evident, there are, nonetheless, problems with such an explanation. First of all, for all the approach's seeming historical materialist rhetoric, one almost necessarily has to be anti-Marxist to support the "economic crisis" position as it assumes there is no need for a proletarian literature when an industrial economy is not in collapse. The

¹² See "The Proletarian Novel," *American Writers' Congress*, ed. Henry Hart (New York: International, 1935): 98-103.

Marxist, on the other hand, would argue that if the proletariat is an exploited class, then its concerns--and differences from the bourgeoisie--would demand expression as much if not more so during periods of supposed economic stability as during a period of complete economic collapse, when capitalism's faults would be laid bare for all to see. The economic crisis approach, in other words, may itself have mistaken a symptom for a cause, precisely because the cause lies outside its ideological purview.

Not surprisingly, then, in order to defend his argument that proletarianism was caused by the Great Depression, Kazin is forced to characterize the twenties as anti-leftist. He achieves this feat by downplaying the importance of journals such as the *Liberator* and *New Masses*, by asserting that there were no radical writers equal in status or popularity to Jack London and Upton Sinclair even though Sinclair published five novels during the 1920s, and by neglecting to mention continuing traditions of socialist and Marxist poetry¹³ and developments in radical drama such as the New Playwrights Theatre.

Finally, if one were to believe Kazin's position, then one would expect that all proletarian novels would focus directly on the Depression as does Steinbeck's *The*

¹³ For an overview of radical poetry produced during the twenties, see Cary Nelson's *Repression and Recovery: Modern American Poetry and the Politics of Cultural Memory, 1910-1945* (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1989) 135-50. Nelson contends that the dissemination of poetry in leftist periodicals actually declined during the Great Depression. For instance, while the *Daily Worker* featured poetry prominently throughout the late 1920s, at the beginning of the Depression "the paper's financial difficulties combined with the militant party's doubts about the centrality of cultural work to keep the paper short and relatively free of poetry. They only published 31 poems in 1930 and fewer still in 1931, 1932, and the first half of 1933" (207). Walter Rideout likewise notes that 1933 saw a drastic reduction in proletarian novels due in part to financial strains upon publishers.

Grapes of Wrath. Yet, many of the most notable left-leaning works published during the Depression describe life in previous decades, foremost among these being Michael Gold's *Jews Without Money*, often called the first proletarian novel.

Hypothesis Two: The Influence of Theory

A second approach toward determining how proletarian literature emerged in the United States is proposed by what I will call "the theory school." According to these critics, proletarianism was expressed first as a theory, as a series of guidelines which creative writers then tried to follow and fulfill. Proponents of the "theory school" can be broken into three temporal segments: those writing concurrently with and in opposition to the advocates of proletarianism, such as Philip Rahv, James T. Farrell, and Edmund Wilson; those writing between the assumed termination of proletarianism and the critical retrospection of the eighties and nineties, such as Daniel Aaron, James Burkhart Gilbert, and Eric Homberger; and those who have most recently re-evaluated theory's place in the construction of American proletarianism, such as Barbara Foley and James F. Murphy.

Those writing during the 1930s who claimed that proletarianism originated as a theory often saw little value in applying class labels to literary works or their authors. Frequently, in addition to contending that proletarianism has no existence outside of theory, these critics assumed that the Communist Party dictated a series of guidelines for proletarian literature. Perhaps the strongest proponent of such a position is Philip Rahv, who wrote in 1939 that proletarianism was "the literature of

a party disguised as the literature of a class" which "explains both the speed of its development and the speed of its disintegration" ("Proletarian Literature" 299-300).

Rahv attributes the appearance of proletarian literature to several causes, among them the economic crisis brought on by the Great Depression and "the exhaustion of the literary modes current in the twenties" (294), but, unlike Kazin, he maintains that the primary factor in its development was the Communist Party, which "appointed political commissars" to oversee its promulgation and theorization and which "conditioned the writers that had come under its control" (295) to produce a utopian literature that sentimentalized the plight of workers and idealized the Soviet Union. Since, according to Rahv, proletarianism lacks any coherent definition or consistent aesthetic principles, fails to separate art from politics, and diverts attention away from the individual toward generalized types, "[i]t cannot properly be called literature" (297) but, instead, was "a vehicle for the dissemination of special policies and views" (297).

If proletarianism were little more than Party doctrine in the form of drama, poetry, and narrative prose, then shifts in policy should be reflected in the literature produced by those writers "whose main service was the carrying out of party assignments" (297). Rahv does not indicate such shifts but instead claims that upon the codification of the Popular Front at the Seventh Congress of the Communist International in 1935, literary proletarianism was "under political orders to commit suicide" (302). The emphases upon the abolition of private property and the overthrow of bourgeois governments in proletarian texts, while once in accord with

Communist Party doctrine, came into conflict with the establishment of a broad movement which considered liberal capitalist democracies important allies in the struggle against fascism.¹⁴ Although Rahv acknowledges that during the Popular Front some "literary adherents [were], of course, lagging behind the 'party line'" (302) so that there is evidence of proletarianism continuing as a movement after 1935, he argues that cultural organs associated with the Communist Party changed their critical practices. No longer was the Communist Party concerned with the creation of a tendentious literature but, instead, sought "public statements approving its political program on current issues" (301) from notable writers while granting those "literary men immunity from its 'Marxist' criticism" (301). This abandonment of demands for radical content and perspective in literary works in favor of creating a unified political orientation among artists and intellectuals, regardless of whether they were radical or bourgeois, "deprived the proletarian writers of those political values which alone distinguished them from the nonproletarians" (303) and effectively ended their movement.¹⁵

While Rahv singled out the Communist Party as both the creator and the destroyer of proletarian literature, other 1930s litterateurs hostile to the elaboration of literature into class-based scenarios focused their attention upon individual critics.

¹⁴ A problem with Rahv's argument is that while the Popular Front was stressed outside of the Soviet Union during the middle to late 1930s, within the Soviet Union this time period witnessed the installation of Soviet socialist realism as the official Communist Party aesthetic.

¹⁵ For a similar explanation of the demise of proletarian literature, see Rideout, *The Radical Novel* 241-54.

Both James T. Farrell, in *A Note on Literary Criticism* (1936), and Edmund Wilson, in "Marxism and Literature" (1937), castigate Michael Gold, Granville Hicks, and other *New Masses* critics for predetermining criteria that ensuing revolutionary literature should fulfill and for evaluating texts from ideological positions external to those texts.

Throughout *A Note on Literary Criticism*, James T. Farrell occasionally indicates that 1930s proletarian literature is in its infancy (82, 86, and 89), yet a main argument of the chapter entitled "The Categories of 'Bourgeois' and 'Proletarian'" directly treats criteria established for this literature by Granville Hicks and other *New Masses* critics. Farrell argues that any distinct separation of proletarianism from other literature according to effect, political value, subject matter, or theme is faulty critical practice, for it ignores the "continuity in literature and literary influences" and "the carry-over value in literature" (88). Further, definitions of and suggestions for proletarian literature made by Michael Gold and Granville Hicks, among others, are not "so important as they assume [them] to be" (88), as this literature's development "will--for some time to come--be constantly influenced by 'bourgeois' literature" (86). Farrell assaults the notion of categories in themselves, arguing that a division of literature into "bourgeois" and "proletarian" ignores shared common features, and he suggests that a far more valuable critical task is to isolate the progressive and regressive elements within existent literature and "to assimilate and further the understanding of the progressive elements, and to negate the influence of the regressive ones" (93).

Although *A Note on Literary Criticism* primarily critiques the practices of "cooking up recipes for tomorrow's 'great' literature" (82) and employing "bourgeois" and "proletarian" as "categories of value" (78) instead of using them as descriptive labels, Farrell also suggests that these critical practices have the effect of promoting the production of inferior works of poetry, fiction, and drama. Toward the end of his study, at which point he ultimately defines art as "a reproduction and a re-creation of a sense of elements from life that interest man" (196) within an internally consistent form, Farrell faults revolutionary literature for "a pointless use of stereotypes and slogans" (150), discerns "a specious emphasis on activism" (152), and decries the tendency toward wish-fulfillment whereby class consciousness and revolutionary actions occur as the result of "the subjective imposition of the author's wishes onto an objective structure" (199). Farrell relates this literary imposition of revolutionary ideology upon the internal structure of a work, regardless of whether that ideology "flows out of the essential factors of environment, situation, milieu, characters" (198), to the "greater evil" of criticism in which one can find "the generalized discussion of the middle class, the proletariat, war and Fascism, the United Front, and the Five-Year Plan, and in such a way that no essential relation is demonstrated between these topics and the book that is being reviewed" (200-01).¹⁶

In contrast, using Dostoevsky as an example of a writer whose works are fruitful for

¹⁶ Farrell continues, "How often, for instance, have we not read in the *New Masses* a book review three-quarters of which was devoted to the reviewer's statement that the crisis is sharpening, with a final quarter devoted to the implication that the reviewer was a better revolutionary and a better Marxist than the author!" (201).

study despite his reactionary tendencies, Farrell counsels that the Marxist critic should avoid praising or dismissing literary texts according to their expressed ideology, which he terms "extra-literary functionalism" (208), and should also refrain from limiting a work to its historical context. Instead, the Marxist critic should delve into the particularities of a text and isolate those elements that speak "for our own time" (208).¹⁷

Although originally quite supportive of Michael Gold and other champions of proletarian literature,¹⁸ Edmund Wilson came to side with Farrell and perhaps took an even more dismissive approach toward advocates of proletarianism. Wilson's "Marxism and Literature" (1937), in part a response to Granville Hicks's 1933 essay entitled "The Crisis in American Criticism," accuses Hicks of acting like the Soviet Writers' Congress of 1934, which, by advocating socialist realism, attempted "to legislate masterpieces into existence--a kind of attempt which always indicates sterility on the part of those who engage in it, and which always actually works, if it has any effect at all, to legislate existing good literature *out of* existence and to discourage the production of any more" (281). In particular, Wilson is troubled by Hicks's foundational criteria "by which to recognize a perfect Marxian novel" even though, by Hicks's own admission, "no novel as yet written perfectly conforms to

¹⁷ As Farrell phrases it, "Whereas, if we adopt the third approach, we are doing our real duty as literary critics--devoting ourselves to the assimilation of Dostoevski's values in and for our own time" (208).

¹⁸ See his "The Economic Interpretation of Wilder," *New Republic* 26 Nov. 1930: 31-32; "The Literary Class War: I," *New Republic* 4 May 1932: 319-23; and "The Literary Class War: II," *New Republic* 11 May 1932: 347-49.

our demands" (Hicks, "The Crisis" 12). Wilson also faults Hicks on a number of grounds, from a lack of "imagination and taste" (277) to an inability to appreciate literature as an art form rather than as polemic, but of most importance is his allegation that Hicks, in his zeal, has forgotten the role of a critic. Whereas, according to Wilson, Marxist critics can "throw a great deal of light on the origins and social significance of works of art" (277), they should refrain from establishing rules for the production of art, as the conventions of "any given school of art" (281) can only be ascertained after the production of works of art by that school.

Edmund Wilson also concurs with Farrell that a literary work's greatest value lies not in its expressed political ideology but in its ability to cause readers to reflect upon their current situations. For Wilson, while works of literature such as Dante's *Divina Commedia* and Shakespeare's *Henry IV* and *Henry V* may have had immediate political importance, even motivation, they persist as works of art and have continued influence not because of their relation to historically bound struggles but because they enable a reader from another milieu "to understand his world and himself" (284). In short, Wilson consigns political motivations to what he terms "short-range literature," which strives for immediate effects, whereas "[l]ong-range literature attempts to sum up wide areas and long periods of human experience, or to extract from them general laws" (284). Wilson's debate with proletarian advocates is that they are too concerned with historical specificity, which prevents literature from participating in "moral interchangeability" (279), whereby "we may transpose the actions and the

sentiments that move us into terms of whatever we do or are ourselves" (279).¹⁹

As examples of authors who facilitate "moral interchangeability," Wilson names Marcel Proust and Thornton Wilder. Wilson's choice of authors is hardly arbitrary, for Proust and Wilder often encountered severe criticism at the hands of critics such as Michael Gold and Granville Hicks.²⁰ In fact, several years earlier Wilson had simultaneously defended Proust and credited him with unintentionally inspiring class consciousness when he wrote the following: "Personally I can testify

¹⁹ One might cite as an example of such advocates Joseph Freeman, who argues in his introduction to *Proletarian Literature in the United States: An Anthology*, ed. Hicks et al (New York International, 1935), that "since no feeling can exist without an object or event, art must of necessity deal with specific experience, even if only obliquely, by evasion and flight" (13). However, Freeman takes pains to stress that this specificity enables the very transposition Wilson requires of "long-range literature":

The best art deals with specific experience which arouses specific emotion in specific people at a specific moment in a specific locale, in such a way that other people who have had similar experiences in other places and times recognize it as their own. Jack Conroy, to whom a Proustian salon with its snobbish pride, envy, and shame is a closed world, can describe the pride, envy, and shame of a factory. We may recognize analogies between the *feelings* of the salon and those of the factory (13)

²⁰ See Granville Hicks, "Revolution and the Novel" *New Masses* 22 May 1934: 23-25, rpt. in *Granville Hicks in the New Masses*, ed. Jack Alan Robbins (Port Washington: Kennikat, 1974) 59-66; and Michael Gold, "Wilder: Prophet of the Genteel Christ," *New Republic* 22 Oct. 1930: 263-64, rpt. in *Mike Gold: A Literary Anthology*, ed. Michael Folsom (New York: International, 1972): 197-202.

Hicks's evaluation of Proust was mixed. While he begins "Revolution and the Novel" by explaining that *Remembrance of Things Past* no longer affects him as powerfully as it had upon a first reading because bourgeois novels cause in him "a definite resistance, a counter-emotion, so to speak, that makes a unified esthetic experience impossible" (62), in a later review Hicks claims that "for the revolutionary intellectual Proust seems to me required reading." See his rev. of *Remembrance of Things Past*, by Marcel Proust, *New Masses* 20 Nov. 1934: 21, rpt. as "Proust and the Proletariat" in *Granville Hicks* 206-09.

that the writer who has made me feel most overwhelmingly that bourgeois society was ripe for burial was none of our American Marxist journalists but Proust" ("The Literary Class War: I" 323).²¹

Wilson concludes his condemnation of *New Masses* critics by arguing that by ignoring this relationship of literature to the past, they have neglected the true progenitors of proletarianism. While those critics sought to transfer literary theory and practices from the Soviet Union to the United States, Wilson announces that, due to great differences in literacy, culture, and literary history between the two nations, American literature has nothing to learn from Soviet literature and that proletarian literature in fact owes much more to a native American tradition stretching from Whitman to Twain and James.

As a reaction against quibbling definitions of proletarianism and against an ultraleftism²² which would deny any value to "bourgeois" literature, either for

²¹ Consider Hicks's response to Wilson:

Proust does give the reader an overwhelming sense of the decadence of bourgeois society; he makes one feel that decadence far more strongly than any propagandist could. But recognition of social rotteness did not make Proust a revolutionary; nor would it have so affected Wilson if the preparatory work had not been done by the very propagandists he scorns. ("Revolution and the Novel" 62-63)

²² The term "leftism" as employed by Marxist critics during the 1930s was a generalized term of abuse used to refer to any number of practices which were judged constrictive, erroneous, or tactically unwise. James F. Murphy, in *The Proletarian Moment: The Controversy over Leftism in Literature* (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1991), presents the following extended definition:

In the mid-thirties, in the two magazines [*New Masses* and the original *Partisan Review*, which ran from 1934-36] and in the American proletarian literature movement as a whole, the term *leftism* was

creative writers or readers, the critiques of Rahv, Farrell, and Wilson have merit.

Furthermore, each brings forth specific comments on literature made by major

Marxist theorists such as Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Trotsky,²³ whereas many of the

employed as an epithet characterizing certain attitudes and practices that were considered unacceptable. Among these was sectarianism in relations with non-Communist writers, and the view that proletarian writers had nothing to learn from bourgeois writers of the past or present. In addition, leftism referred to the disregard for aesthetic values, the limitation of literary criticism to sociological analysis, and the demand that proletarian literature be narrowly agitational in character, addressing events of the moment. In criticism of individual works the term was directed against tendentiousness, which included the stereotyped portrayal of workers and capitalists as heroes and villains, the insertion of abstract propaganda into fiction, poetry, and drama, and the general distortion or coloring of reality for political ends. (1)

²³ The first several pages of Wilson's "Marxism and Literature" are devoted to presenting Marx's and Engels's scattered comments on literature in letters, *The Holy Family*, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, and *Dialectics and Nature* as well as to summarizing a few of Trotsky's arguments in *Literature and Revolution* and repeating various uncited remarks made by Lenin. Farrell likewise supports his arguments with references from Marx's and Engels's correspondence, Marx's *The Poverty of Philosophy*, Lenin's *What Is to Be Done?*, and Bukharin's *Problems of Soviet Literature*. Although Farrell never mentions Trotsky in *A Note on Literary Criticism*, his positions regarding the formation of a distinct proletarian literature owe much to *Literature and Revolution*. For an evaluation of the influence of *Literature and Revolution* upon Farrell, see Alan M. Wald, *James T. Farrell: The Revolutionary Socialist Years* (New York: New York UP, 1978) 40-46. Rahv concerns himself exclusively with theorists of proletarianism, yet portions of "Proletarian Literature: A Political Autopsy" share extraordinary similarities with Trotsky's *Literature and Revolution*. Compare, for instance, Rahv's statement that "The proletariat, on the other hand, before it can achieve the freedom that participation in culture requires, must first institute changes in society which includes its own abolition. And if that historic task is ever accomplished, it will not be the proletariat--which will then no longer exist--but a classless and stateless humanity that will shape the new culture in its own image" (298) with Trotsky's "The essence of the new culture will be not an aristocratic one for a privileged minority, but a mass culture, a universal and popular one. . . . But this process will develop only through a series of historic stages. In the degree to which it is successful it will weaken the

proponents of proletarian literature placed emphasis on Soviet institutions and merely mentioned "the Marxian method" or applied Marx's economic theories directly to the formation of culture without considering the relative autonomy of base and superstructure.²⁴ However, Rahv, Farrell, and Wilson are also prone to exaggerations and mischaracterizations which may owe more to their increasing disgust with the Communist Party and the Soviet Union during the late 1930s than to the actual nature of proletarian criticism.

For instance, Rahv's contention that the Communist Party controlled the critical evaluation and promulgation of proletarian literature is puzzling when one considers that although Rahv and William Phillips claimed that they created the *Partisan Review* "to free revolutionary literature from domination by the immediate strategy of a political party" ("In Retrospect: Ten Years of Partisan Review" qtd. in Aaron 298), Joseph Freeman helped them found the magazine. Additionally, the

class character of the proletariat and in this way it will wipe out the basis of a proletarian culture" (192-93).

²⁴ As examples, one might peruse Irwin Granich's [Michael Gold's] "Towards Proletarian Art," *Liberator* Feb. 1921: 20-24, which devotes several paragraphs to the Soviet Proletkult but never mentions a single Marxist theorist, and V. F. Calverton's *The Liberation of American Literature* (New York: Scribner's, 1932), which "trace[s] the development of American literature in relationship with those social forces, expressed in the form of class content, which it is necessary for us to understand first if we are to work out a sound critical method" (xii). Although Farrell accuses Hicks of exhibiting "a mechanically deterministic 'Marxism'" (31), Hicks criticized Calverton for "oversimplification. Obviously it does not help us much to know that James, Howells, and Mark Twain were all members of the bourgeoisie; we knew that all along, and knowing that, we want to find out why, though they were members of the same class, they wrote so differently" ("The Crisis in American Criticism" 7).

majority of those who wrote for *Partisan Review* also contributed to *New Masses*, and, as Daniel Aaron puts it, "when party spokesmen interfered in matters of literary policy, the editors of *The New Masses* listened to them but then sometimes went their own way. They certainly did not regard themselves as minions of Stalin" (300).²⁵

The claim that proletarian apologists outright rejected bourgeois literature and denied any connection between proletarianism and America's literary past similarly depends upon a deliberate misreading.²⁶ In "The Crisis in American Criticism," an essay that Wilson derides in his "Marxism and Literature," Hicks not only states that "a novel written by a member of the bourgeoisie might be better than a novel written by a member of or sympathizer with the proletariat" (12-13), but he also singles out Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past* as an example, for "Proust is, nevertheless, a better writer than the avowed revolutionary who cannot give us an intense perception of either the character of the proletariat or the character of the bourgeoisie" (13).

Although Gold does mention the Soviet Proletkult as a program successful in encouraging artistic productions by members of the proletariat, "Towards Proletarian Art" suggests that Walt Whitman was the originator of American proletarianism, and

²⁵ See Aaron's *Writers on the Left: Episodes in American Literary Communism* (1961. New York: Columbia UP, 1992) 297-300 for an extended critique of Rahv. This critique isolates "two faulty assumptions" on Rahv's part: "that the party, then and after, deeply concerned itself with writers and writing, and that radical writers formed a cohesive and malleable group" (299).

²⁶ For an analysis of how Farrell distorts Gold's and Hick's stances *vis-a-vis* such "bourgeois" writers as Dickens, Proust, and Shakespeare, see James F. Murphy, *The Proletarian Moment: The Controversy over Leftism in Literature* (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1991) 165-72.

in later essays Gold continually added to his list of important American literary forebears.²⁷

Finally, although Rahv, Farrell, and Wilson would rescue Marxism from the Marxists, they tend in their critiques to move beyond a complication of the base-superstructure model into a complete dissociation of art from ideology. Alan Wald notes that Rahv's "line of reasoning . . . engages rather simplistic, non-Marxist assumptions about ideology and epistemology that can only be called pragmatist" (*The New York Intellectuals* 228), for Rahv argues that great literature communicates lived experience directly whereas ideology is based upon abstractions that distort lived experience and must be in the service of some political program.²⁸ Likewise, Wilson's dismissal of political effect or motivation in the works of Dante and Shakespeare as immaterial indicates his increasing distancing of himself from his previous position that art and ideology are intimately linked.²⁹

²⁷ For instance, see "O Californians! O Ladies and Gentlemen!," *Gently, Brother* (March 1924), rpt. in *Mike Gold* 117-25, which praises Whitman, Emerson, Thoreau, Anderson, O'Neill, Dreiser, and Sandburg while attacking the socialist Jack London; and "Wilder: Prophet of the Genteel Christ," which evaluates Wilder not against proletarian writers but finds him lacking when compared to Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman, Shakespeare, Milton, Fielding, Burns, Blake, Byron, Chaucer, and Hardy.

²⁸ See *The New York Intellectuals* 226-30 for Wald's full account of "the enfeeblement of American Marxism at the hands of pragmatism" (229). Using Terry Eagleton as a corrective to Rahv, Wald posits, "For the Marxist, to settle on the terrain of experience is to submerge oneself in the unexamined stuff of ideology" (230).

²⁹ "Marxism and Literature" revises the argument of Wilson's "The Literary Class War: II," in which he asserts the following:

But we must remember that the "Divine Comedy" is the expression of

In the decades following the heyday of proletarianism, the assumption that proletarianism was a category determined by critics and then perhaps emulated by creative writers became concretized. Again, as was the case in the work of Farrell and Wilson, certain critics were singled out as being more important than others, but whereas Farrell and Wilson concerned themselves primarily with Granville Hicks, for Hicks had provided the lengthiest commentaries on proletarian literature through his literary history *The Great Tradition* and his articles in the *New Masses*, later critics singled out Michael Gold as the originator of American proletarianism. Long considered the authoritative work on 1930s Marxism, Daniel Aaron's *Writers on the Left* participates in this mythmaking of proletarianism's being born from the mind of Gold. Although Aaron's book discusses numerous notable figures who at one time or another were associated with the Communist Party, Gold figures as an especially prominent and forceful figure, evidenced by such section titles as "Gold Takes Over," and in a portion called "The Cult of the Proletarian," Gold is nominated as the leader of that cult. Aaron does provide some background for Gold's emergence:

a strongly held point of view; and we must not allow the bourgeois critic to ticket as propaganda revolutionary works of art not in the propaganda class simply because the bourgeois critic does not like the point of view. Examples are Bernard Shaw's plays and Dos Passos's novels. Both have a background of Marxism--as the "Divine Comedy" has a background of medieval Catholicism. And nothing provides plainer evidence of the class bias of the bourgeois critic than his continual lamentations over the fact that the works of contemporary writers have no central faith or system to sustain them, and his simultaneous rejection as propaganda of all those works which depend on Marxism. (347)

Long before Michael Gold conjured up his vision of a Shakespeare in overalls, other American intellectuals had from time to time reached out the hand of fellowship to the "swart and sweaty artizan." Even the relatively small number who took up the cause of labor, however, did so in a gingerly, rather than a genial, way. They were more likely to weep over the wrongs of the working class or to raise horrific nightmares of a debased proletariat descending like the Huns on a corrupt plutocracy or to write reproving lectures in which they demonstrated to middle-class readers why the laboring man must not be excluded or neglected. (205)

However, according to Aaron, when Gold assumed the editorship of *New Masses* in 1928, "the magazine became what Gold had always wanted it to be: a revolutionary organ dedicated to the working class," and "under Gold's direction it welcomed eagerly what one studiously proletarian writer called the 'as yet, semi-articulate voices hidden in the mines, textile mills, farms, saw-mills, and lumber-camps'" (204, 205). Gold had not only made the initial call for proletarianism in his 1921 *Liberator* essay "Towards Proletarian Art," but he also defended the genre against Trotsky and "remained faithful to the working class and struggled hard to keep the fire of revolution from flickering out during the twenties. No other writer tried more conscientiously to combat Bohemianism or expatriate indifference" (207).

Aaron's representation of Gold as the founding father of American proletarianism was to continue in works on the 1930s produced by other critics

within the next few decades. James Burkhart Gilbert, in *Writers and Partisans: A History of Literary Radicalism in America* (1968), claims that proletarian "criticism came before the literary movement" (79). Not surprisingly, then, Gold figures prominently in Gilbert's elaboration of a literature dependent upon theorization, for Gold's 1921 essay "Toward Proletarian Art" announced the traits of such art which later proletarians were to follow. Further, the body of his critical work "did much to popularize Soviet proletarian literature in American Communist circles" (80), and he "was a major bridge between sociological and proletarian criticism, between the prewar Village and the Communist Literary movement of the 1920s" (78).

Likewise, Eric Homberger, in *American Writers and Radical Politics, 1900-39: Equivocal Commitments* (1986), credits Gold with "almost single-handedly . . . creat[ing] an American proletarian literature" (139). For Homberger, Gold was not only the first to call for a proletarian literature but also "was later to serve as a model for a proletarian literary movement in America" (123).

The accounts of Aaron, Gilbert, and Homberger are far less polemicized than those of Rahv, Farrell, and Wilson perhaps because of their temporal distance from the controversy over proletarianism and from the political antagonisms between communists and the self-styled anti-Stalinist left. Aaron, in particular, thoroughly enumerates Gold's efforts to open up the *Liberator* and *New Masses* to worker-writers who might not have had the opportunity to publish in other magazines, and Homberger notes important distinctions between Gold's conceptions of proletarianism and the history of proletarianism in the Soviet Union. However, since these three

studies concern themselves primarily with literary criticism and do not evaluate the creative work of proletarian writers, one is left to wonder if Gold's early use of the term "proletarian" and strong advocacy of work by and about workers necessarily produced that literature. Such causation seems unlikely as Gold did not publish his first novel until 1930, and at the very least such an effect would run counter to Gold's and Freeman's claims that the proletariat possesses a culture which has yet to be acknowledged by bourgeois critics.

Recent studies of American proletarianism have turned away from crediting individual theorists with the foundation of the literary movement and toward examining proletarianism as a broadbased and international phenomenon. While Gold and Hicks may have played significant roles in the promotion and theorization of American proletarianism, Soviet organizations and publications provided inspiration for, as well as periodically admonished, the development of proletarianism within the United States. However, whereas Rahv characterized American literary proletarianism as the propagandistic brainchild of a monolithic Communist Party, two recent critics, Barbara Foley and James F. Murphy, have engaged in a re-evaluation of the Communist Party's association with American proletarianism. Key to this re-evaluation is a complication of the Communist Party's relationship to literary production overall, which relationship developed along different lines in the Soviet Union and the United States, involved a greater degree of mutability and heterogeneity than Rahv would acknowledge, and can be "understood far better according to a model of influence than according to one of coercion" (Foley, *Radical*

Representations 84).

In defending American literary proletarianism against what she calls "The Legacy of Anti-Communism,"³⁰ Barbara Foley stresses that although the "Communist-led movement" in politics and culture "both generated and cultivated" (45) proletarianism, the Communist Parties in the Soviet Union and the United States, Party organs, and critics affiliated with or favorable toward the Communist Party did not prescribe specific aesthetics to writers. In fact, Foley notes that the CPUSA (Communist Party of the United States) "as regards literary matters, . . . had no line at all" (125) by quoting at length from CPUSA Chairman Earl Browder's address to the 1935 American Writers Congress.³¹ Further, Foley contests claims made by Max Eastman and Eric Homberger that the Soviet Union dictated practices which American proletarian critics and writers "followed as closely as possible"

³⁰ In the first chapter of *Radical Representations*, entitled "The Legacy of Anti-Communism," Foley rehearses the various charges formulated against proletarian literature as well as commends several more balanced treatments of the movement. See Foley, *Radical Representations* 3-43.

³¹ See Earl Browder's "Communism and Literature," *American Writers' Congress*, ed. Henry Hart (New York: International, 1935) 66-70. During this address, Browder denied that the party sought to "impos[e] any pre-conceived patterns upon the writer" (69) and maintained:

. . . that the method of our work in this field cannot be one of Party resolutions giving judgment upon artistic, aesthetic questions. There is no fixed "Party line" by which works of art can be automatically separated into sheep and goats. Within the camp of the working class, in struggle against the camp of capitalism, we find our best atmosphere in the free give and take of a writers' and critics' democracy, which is controlled only by its audience, the masses of its readers, who constitute the final authority. (68-69)

(Homberger, *American Writers* 140).³² While Foley admits that the American proletarian movement often received harsh treatment in the pages of *International Literature*,³³ she notes that RAPP (Russian Association of Proletarian Writers), the organization which dominated both the IURW (International Union of Revolutionary Writers) and the editorial policies of *International Literature*, "never received any official endorsement from the CPSU [Communist Party of the Soviet Union] and in fact often clashed with it" (77).³⁴ Thus, *International Literature* could not foist a "Party line" upon American critics and writers, and the criticisms of American proletarianism found in its pages should be considered "as just that--criticisms--rather than as 'directives'" (78).³⁵ Finally, Foley notes that American critics and Party

³² See Eric Homberger, *American Writers and Radical Politics, 1900-39*, especially 119-40, and Max Eastman, *Writers in Uniform: A Study of Literature and Bureaucratism* (New York: Knopf, 1934).

³³ *International Literature*, originally titled *Literature of the World Revolution*, was the official organ of the International Union of Revolutionary Writers (IURW) and was published in English, French, German, and Russian editions bimonthly, its first issue appearing June 1931. After the First International Conference of Proletarian and Revolutionary Writers, held in Moscow in November 1927, the International Bureau for Revolutionary Literature (IBRL) was established and was renamed the IURW during the Second Conference of Proletarian and Revolutionary Writers, held in Kharkov in November 1930. See Murphy 38.

³⁴ For extended treatments of RAPP, see Edward J. Brown, *The Proletarian Episode in Russian Literature, 1928-1932* (New York: Columbia UP, 1953) and James T. Murphy, *The Proletarian Moment: The Controversy over Leftism in Literature* (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1991). According to Foley, American Communist Party members and proponents of proletarianism did not agree on the propriety of the Central Committee's 1932 decision to dissolve RAPP and all other existent proletarian organizations either. Michael Gold supported RAPP and faulted "petty bureaucrats" for its dissolution while Joseph Freeman argued that RAPP had outlived its usefulness (Foley 83-84).

³⁵ *New Masses* did print a list of criticisms made by the IURW in its September

members continued to hold certain theoretical positions long after they were abandoned in the Soviet Union and used critical terms quite differently than they were applied in the Soviet Union.³⁶ Although certain commentators, such as Rahv and Rideout, maintain that the Comintern's adoption of the Popular Front effectively ended proletarian literature in the United States, Foley argues that the 1935 American Writers' Congress demonstrates that American critics were moving leftward, as evidenced by the furor over Kenneth Burke's suggestion that the symbol of "the worker" be replaced by that of "the people," which incident "indicates that the tenor of the Congress was anything but Popular Frontist" (Foley 79).³⁷

Within an American context, Foley repudiates the accusation that Party-

1932 issue, but Foley contends that the criticisms were debated and not printed until participants in the debate agreed upon the criticisms (78). See "Resolution on the Work of *New Masses* for 1931," *New Masses* Sept. 1932: 20-21.

³⁶ Malcolm Cowley expressed the difficulty of keeping up with Soviet trends in "Where We Stand," a symposium published in *International Literature* 4.3 (1934): 80-94. Indicating the temporal lag created by a dependency upon translation, Cowley comments:

Nobody here in the United States who doesn't read Russian knows very much about Soviet literature. A good many Soviet novels are translated, but they are always the novels read four or five years ago in Russia--thus, during the first five-year plan, we were getting the disillusioned books written during the NEP, and at present we are getting novels written in the first flush of the five-year plan--and we aren't getting enough of them. (82)

³⁷ In addition to Burke's "Revolutionary Symbolism in America," see "Discussion and Proceedings," *American Writers' Congress* 165-92. Edward Seaver's "Another Writer's Position" likewise demonstrates a strengthening of the left within proletarian circles rather than a broad-based anti-fascist movement. Consider Seaver's assertion that "The literary honeymoon is over, and I believe the time is fast approaching when we will no longer classify authors as proletarian writers and fellow-travelers, but as Party writers and non-Party writers" (22).

affiliated critics acted as commissars. She notes that many novelists participated in debates regarding proletarianism in the book review section of *New Masses* and frequently dismissed evaluations of their own work or challenged critics to be more thoroughly Marxist.³⁸ Nor did the fact that "leftist 'mentor' characters who routinely peopled proletarian novels were as likely to be associated with the IWW, or some vaguely defined socialist movement, as with the CP itself" (112), seem to trouble American critics. Even when radical novels contained highly negative portraits of Communist organizers, such as in John Dos Passos's *The Big Money* and John Steinbeck's *In Dubious Battle*, the works frequently received lavish praise in the *New Masses*. Citing from works by Stanley Burnshaw, Gold, Freeman, Hicks, and Moissaye Olgin, Foley also demonstrates that, although advocates of proletarianism revealed their particular tastes through their criticism, there was never a consensus regarding an appropriate form for proletarian literature, and many of these critics refused to declare that one form was preferable over another.³⁹

Although Foley explicitly rejects a model of coercion in her account of

³⁸ Several surveys of writers' opinions regarding Marxist criticism and demands for radically committed literature, proletarian or otherwise, appeared in leftist literary journals during the late 1920s and early 1930s. Three of the most notable are "Authors' Field Day: A Symposium on Marxist Criticism," *New Masses* 3 July 1934: 27-32; "Where We Stand," *International Literature* July 1934: 80-96; and "Whither the American Writer," *Modern Quarterly* 6.2 (1932): 11-19.

³⁹ Perhaps the clearest statement to this effect was made by Michael Gold in "Notes of the Month," *New Masses* Sept. 1930: 3-5. Before sketching a few characteristics of "a new form that is evolving, which one might name the 'Proletarian Realism,'" Gold insists that "It is dogmatic folly to seize upon any single literary form, and erect it into a pattern for all proletarian literature" (5).

American literary proletarianism, she does maintain that the movement began as theory--"American proletarian literature was to a considerable degree born out of an a priori conception of itself" (45)--and was highly influenced by developments in the Soviet Union. Although she places some qualifications upon her assessment, such as when she notes that "absent the Communist movement, no doubt some kind of left-wing literature would have sprung up in the U.S. as a response to Soviet socialist construction on the one hand and the 1930s economic crisis on the other" (44), and though she acknowledges that she could be accused of "unduly deemphasizing the creative writers' role in defining the proletarian novel through their own practice--a practice that may have had relatively little to do with any guidelines laid down by the critics" (45), she credits the Soviet Union for being the example upon which American literary proletarianism would be based. Foremost among the Soviet examples was the Proletkult (Society of the Proletarian Arts), a short-lived organization that encouraged workers to develop art and literature. According to Foley, the Proletkult was responsible for the popularity of the term "proletarian" in American leftist magazines and led Michael Gold to call for an American proletarian literature in his 1921 essay "Towards Proletarian Art."⁴⁰ Among the specific Proletkult influences upon American proletarianism Foley cites are "the promotion of worker-correspondents in the *Daily Worker* and the *New Masses*, the encouragement

⁴⁰ For background on the Proletkult, see Brown, *The Proletarian Episode in Russian Literature, 1928-1932* 6-10; Murphy, *The Proletarian Moment* 21-24; and Gleb Struve, *Russian Literature under Lenin and Stalin, 1917-1953* (Norman: U of Oklahoma P, 1971) 27-29.

given to middle-class writers to acquaint themselves with the intimate details of work-processes, even the carryover of the Soviet term 'sketch' to describe brief worker-authored factual accounts" (146). Foley also singles out the influence of LEF (Left Front of Art), whose members "were hostile to texts that 'psychologized' and 'heroized' their characters and declared that 'our epic is the newspaper'" (67).⁴¹

While Foley's model of influence is far superior to a model of coercion, she tends to overstate her case. Particularly distressing is her establishment of "precedents." For instance, when she states that "Conroy's oft-quoted statement of preference for a literature of fact . . . had precedent in the enthusiasm for texts documenting the 'biography of objects' that . . . prevailed in Soviet circles" (66) and that "Americans' interest in various forms of literary collectivism--whether texts collectively authored or the genre of the 'collective novel'--also had historical precedent in Soviet experience" (66), she implies a causality which is debatable. According to Douglas Wixson, though Conroy "knew vaguely about RAPP, the Soviet revolutionary group of proletarian writers, and had read in *New Masses* the

⁴¹ For background on LEF and its various manifestations, see Victor Erlich, *Modernism and Revolution: Russian Literature in Transition* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1994) 217-20; Murphy, *The Proletarian Moment* 32-34; and Struve, *Russian Literature under Lenin and Stalin, 1917-53* 83-85. Unfortunately, Foley tends to combine Soviet organizations with similar aesthetics. For instance, she suggests that Sergei Mikhailovich Tretiakov was a member of the Proletkult when she comments, "The Americans' interest in a literature based on factuality and verisimilitude reflected in large part their continuing loyalty to the Proletkult concept--the 'facts, facts, facts' of which Serge Tretiakov had written with such enthusiasm" (146). Tretiakov was not a member of the Proletkult but a Siberian futurist, a member of the futurist organization Tvorchestvo (Creation), and a contributor to LEF's eponymous magazine and, later, *Novy LEF*. See Struve 83 and 215-17.

report of the American delegation to the 1930 Kharkov Conference" (262) and gave "unqualified support to the Soviet Experiment in his editorializing" (261), his "knowledge of the 'proletariat' was experiential, practical, not theoretical or ideological" (246), and if any political "organization" asserted a great deal of influence upon his writing, it was the Industrial Workers of the World.⁴² Foley's subsequent claim that Conroy's address to the American Writers' Congress of 1935, "The Worker as Writer," indicates the degree to which Americans were affected by the Proletkult is confusing, considering the mixed treatment Conroy received at the Congress.⁴³ To be sure, Gold does mention the Proletkult specifically in "Toward Proletarian Art," but he forsakes a major platform of that organization--the education of workers by middle-class intellectuals, a vanguardism that Gold refutes, which rejection indicates that he, too, might have had a more Wobbly than Communist

⁴² Wixson further claims that Conroy "violated nearly every tenet of proletarian realism" (245), which assertion is not surprising, for, instead of imitating the work of other radical novelists, Conroy mimicked strategies of resistance employed by workers with whom he came into contact through his attention to "humor and folk expression" (245):

Worker resistance, for instance, takes many forms in Conroy's writing: play, indifference, diversion, pranks, storytelling, jokes, and subversion. Visible to the "insider," the worker accepted by his mates, are informal structures of protest expressed in the language of resistance. Jack had been privy to these informal expressions since a child in Monkey Nest; he had endured the usual greenhorn pranks in the Wabash shops, hunkered shoulder to shoulder with Wobblies in boxcars, stood in picket and unemployment lines. Workers' language--the jokes, anecdotes, storytelling, verbal pranks--often masked subtle displays of resistance. (245)

⁴³ Wixson alleges that, though Conroy's address was largely misunderstood and misrepresented by revisionist historians, it aroused considerable hostility and ridicule on the part of "many eastern critics and commentators" (390). See Wixson 388-94.

notion of the proletariat at the time.⁴⁴ Finally, though there were Soviet precedents for the collective novel, there were earlier American precedents, such as *The Whole Family: A Novel by Twelve Authors* (1908).⁴⁵ Rather than trying to establish clear lines of influence from the Soviet Union upon American proletarianism, it might be best to adopt a paradigm of eclectic borrowing on the part of individual American critics and writers as does Wixson when he suggests that "Gold and other American Marxists selected what they wished to champion from the confusing and shifting changes in Soviet literary theory and politics" (262).⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Foley claims Gold "drew a direct connection" between American workers' "hunger" for a proletarian culture and the Proletkult (64), yet Gold devotes more of "Towards Proletarian Art" to Walt Whitman than the Proletkult, calls Whitman the "heroic spiritual grandfather of our generation in America" ("Towards Proletarian Art" 67), and even links Whitman with the Proletkult when he remarks, "The Russian revolutionists have been aware with Walt that the spiritual cement of a literature and art is needed to bind together a society" (69). As bizarre as this last contention may sound, it may have some foundation, for Deming Brown has noted in *Soviet Attitudes toward American Writing* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1962) that Russians' "favorite American poet has always been Walt Whitman, whose verses were widely translated even before the Revolution" (13).

⁴⁵ By no means can *The Whole Family* be considered a radical novel, but one of the contributors, Mary Heaton Vorse, would go on to be a radical journalist, a founding editor of the *Masses*, an organizer for the IWW, a strike participant, the publicity director for the Communist-led Passaic, New Jersey, textile worker strike of 1926, and author of the first Gastonia novel, *Strike!* (1930). Regardless of the political orientation of *The Whole Family*, the novel demonstrates that radical American writers engaged in literary experimentation long before any Soviet models were available.

⁴⁶ Such eclecticism verged on contradiction, such as when, in *Voices of October: Art and Literature in Soviet Russia* (New York: Vanguard, 1930), Joseph Freeman reprimands LEF for "their extreme views and their pretension to be the leaders of communist art" (42) yet praises the artistic accomplishments of the LEF members Eisenstein and Meyerhold.

If Foley tends to blur distinctions between antagonistic Soviet models of proletarianism, James T. Murphy, in *The Proletarian Moment: The Controversy over Leftism in Literature* (1991), complicates the issue of Soviet influence. Particularly important is his depiction of the dynamic and competitive nature of theories of proletarianism and the organizations which furthered them within the Soviet Union between 1917 and 1932, which nation he characterizes as a "scene of heated rivalry among a plethora of literary groups, including the Proletcult and its various split-off groups, the circle of 'fellow travellers' around Alexander Voronsky, and the former futurists organized in the Left Front of Art (LEF)" (21). Although Murphy does see a consistent commitment to the development of proletarian arts and culture on the part of Lenin and the Central Committee, by his account, definitions of proletarianism, methods of producing it, organizations which gained the support of the Central Committee, and the degree to which the Central Committee endorsed one organization over another were in a state of constant flux between the establishment of the Soviet Union and dissolution of RAPP in 1932, as were the organizations themselves.⁴⁷

The effect of such fluctuation and frequent disagreement among Soviet organizations is that if writers for the *New Masses* were looking for a "Party line"

⁴⁷ Factionalism and fragmentation among Soviet literary organizations began shortly after the institution of the Proletkult in 1917. In 1919 a group of proletarian poets broke from the Proletkult and founded Kuznitsa (The Smithy), and then founded the All-Russian Association of Proletarian Writers (VAPP), which was later renamed RAPP. In 1922 Kuznitsa and VAPP feuded over NEP (New Economic Policy), with the result that many abandoned Kuznitsa and joined with the Communist Youth League to form the October Group. See Edward Brown 10-16.

from Moscow to follow, they would have been hard pressed to discover what that Party line was, for it constantly shifted, and, especially during the era of the New Economic Policy, the Central Committee, even when making statements which aligned itself with particular organizations and approaches, was reluctant to silence oppositional voices.⁴⁸ Thus, by the time, in February 1921, that Michael Gold praised the Proletkult for enabling the free expression of the "art [that] has always

⁴⁸ A particularly important statement made by the Central Committee of the CPUSSR is the 18 June 1925 resolution entitled "On the Party's Policy in the Field of Literature" (Trans. C. Vaughan James, rpt. in C. Vaughan James, *Soviet Socialist Realism: Origins and Theory* [New York: St. Martin's, 1973] 116-19). Although Murphy is right to point out that the resolution contains a "strong commitment to the promotion of proletarian literature" (26), he underemphasizes the Central Committee's absolute refusal to grant "a *legal monopoly* in matters of literature and publishing to some group or literary organisation" (Central Committee 119). Rather, in keeping with the principles of the New Economic Policy, "the Party must pronounce in favour of free competition between the various groupings and streams in this sphere. Any other decision of the question would be an official-bureaucratic pseudo-decision" (118-19). In fact, as Murphy notes, this resolution contains veiled criticisms of October's "vehement polemics against non-Communist writers" (25). For further discussions of literary conflicts during the New Economic Policy, see Edward Brown, *The Proletarian Episode in Russian Literature, 1928-1932* 19-34; Katerina Clark, "The 'Quiet Revolution' in Soviet Intellectual Life," *Russia in the Era of NEP: Explorations in Soviet Society and Culture*, ed. Sheila Fitzpatrick, Alexander Rabinowitch, and Richard Stites (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1991) 210-230; and Marc Slonim, *Soviet Russian Literature: Writers and Problems, 1917-1977*, 2nd rev. ed. (New York: Oxford UP, 1977) 41-60.

During the remainder of the 1920s the Central Committee would continue to be a voice of moderation and toleration. Though, by Murphy's account, "throughout the four years of the RAPP's existence the Party maintained close relations with the organization" (27), the Committee did not hesitate to check RAPP's vituperative excesses. When in 1928 Maxim Gorky defended the poet Molchanov against the abuse he received from RAPP and Gorky was subsequently labelled "a class enemy" and "protector of anti-Soviet elements" (James 74), the Central Committee issued a censorious resolution which called the critiques of Gorky "grossly mistaken and bordering on hooliganism" (qtd. in James 74). Likewise, the CPUSSR chastised RAPP for its attacks on Boris Pilnyak. See James 73-74; Murphy 86-87.

flourished secretly in the hearts of the masses" and for not promoting "an artificial theory evolved in the brains of a few phrase-intoxicated intellectuals, and foisted by them on the masses" ("Towards Proletarian Art" 69) Lenin had already, in October 1920, censured Alexander Bogdanov⁴⁹ and called "for the subordination of the Proletcult to the People's Commissariat of Education" (Murphy 23).⁵⁰ Whether or not American advocates of proletarianism were confused by the multiple models of proletarianism emerging from the Soviet Union, the diversity of positions taken by writers for the *New Masses* illustrates that American criticism represented an eclectic mixture of contradictory Soviet theories with little attempt on the editors' part to further one particular approach.⁵¹ Nor was there any consistency regarding the value

⁴⁹ Bogdanov formulated his theories of proletarian culture in the years immediately preceding the 1917 revolution while he was a member of Vpered (Forward), an organization which, according to Herman Ermolaev, "disagreed with Lenin on a number of political, philosophical, social, and cultural issues" (16). See Ermolaev's *Soviet Literary Theories, 1917-1934* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1963) 9-18 for a fuller account of the disputes between Bogdanov and Lenin. In 1917, Bogdanov and another former Vpered member, Anatoly Lunacharsky, founded the Proletkult as an organization independent of the Communist Party, for they believed "that government institutions employed many ideologically alien elements of nonproletarian stock" (Ermolaev 11).

⁵⁰ This action effectively shifted attention away from the development of a proletarian culture strictly among the proletariat to "an alternative definition of proletarian culture, in which [Lenin] emphasized the ideological viewpoint, the role of the Party, and the heritage" (Murphy 23). See V. I. Lenin, "On Proletarian Culture," in C. Vaughan James, *Soviet Socialist Realism: Origins and Theories* (New York: St. Martin's, 1973): 112-13; and Central Committee of the CPUSSR, "On the Proletcults," in James 113-15.

⁵¹ Unlike the situation in the Soviet Union, where each literary group or association frequently published its own journal wherein contributors promoted consistent specific aesthetics, the *New Masses* and other American radical magazines of the 1930s tended to be open forums wherein individual critics debated from

of individual novelists. As Murphy notes,

If one article depicted Proust as the epitome of the art-for-art's sake decadent esthete, a review of his novel *Swann's Way* praised its "fine delineation and careful artistry coupled with a boldness and realism that sends a thrill through the reader." While Gold found much to criticize in Hemingway, Dos Passos declared his *Farewell to Arms* to be "the best written book that has seen the light of day in America for many a long day . . . a magnificent novel." (69)

If there is one drawback to Murphy's approach, it is that he concentrates on "the proletarian literature movement as an international whole" (13) to the exclusion of considering the possibility that the development of this type of literature in the United States may in large part have been due in some notable way to a native tradition of socialist and revolutionary literature. This is especially odd since Murphy declares that "the discussion over proletarian literature and aesthetics began in the *New Masses* and the Communist party press long before there was a literary movement to speak of" (58) after spending several pages detailing "antecedents of proletarian fiction" (55) such as the critic V. F. Calverton, the journalist John Reed, the novelists Jack London and Upton Sinclair, and the periodicals *Comrade* and

diverse positions. Take, for instance, the opening paragraph of A. B. Magil's "Pity and Terror" (*New Masses* 8 [Dec. 1932]: 16-19):

Philip Rahv's article, *The Literary Class War*, in the August *New Masses* raises a number of theoretical questions of extreme importance. Unfortunately his article is such a weird compound of truth, half-truth, and pure rubbish that it serves more to confuse than to clarify. (16)

Masses.

Hypothesis Three: The Proletarian Usable Past

A third approach to the development of proletarian literature in the United States stresses that this literature is more indebted to American traditions of radical literature and politics than it is to either specific economic conditions in the United States or to theoretical frameworks established by American Marxist critics or Soviet organizations. Contrary to Rahv, Foley, Murphy, and all others who would maintain that the Soviet Union and Communist Party played a significant role in the development of proletarian literature and literary theories in 1930s America, Cary Nelson argues for such a nativist approach in *Repression and Recovery: Modern American Poetry and the Politics of Cultural Memory, 1910-1945* (1989), wherein he contends that "even if the CPUSA had never been founded, the Great Depression would have intensified existing American traditions and poetry about class conflict" (164). What separates Nelson from Kazin and other proponents of the "economic crisis" explanation of the origins of American literary proletarianism, however, is his revelation of a radical "usable past"⁵² dating back to the 1820s. Labelling "proletarian literature" a "notorious category" (134) which has led literary historians

⁵² Throughout the remainder of this chapter, I will adopt Van Wyck Brooks's phrase the "usable past" to indicate historians' practice of searching for American traditions comparable in political orientation with early twentieth-century radical literature. See Brooks's "On Creating a Usable Past," *Dial* 64 (11 Apr. 1918): 337-41, rpt. in *Van Wyck Brooks: The Early Years*, rev. ed., ed. Claire Sprague (Boston: Northeastern UP, 1993) 219-26.

to isolate American radical literature of the 1930s from that of previous decades, Nelson asserts that although "the international debates over proletarian literature were primarily a feature of the 1930s" (134), radical poetry of that decade participated in a relatively seamless tradition stretching from American and English 19th-century and early 20th-century socialist poetry and song through IWW newspapers to "the whole range of traditions of social and political poetry in America" (165) during the 1940s and 1950s. Among the specific native influences upon 1930s proletarians Nelson mentions are Walt Whitman, Yiddish labor poetry, which Nelson claims had a large impact on Gold and Joseph Freeman, and the publications *Comrade* (1901-05), the *Masses* (1911-17), and the *Liberator* (1918-24). It is one thing to assert influence, but Nelson thoroughly documents the widespread practice among proletarians of "placing themselves within a tradition of American political writing" (299 n. 178). For instance, in the interests "of acquainting readers with earlier political writing of which they were often wholly unfamiliar" (299 n. 178), the *Daily Worker* regularly published articles on poets ranging from Philip Freneau, John Greenleaf Whittier, and Walt Whitman to Joe Hill; Alan Calmer published articles in *International Literature* and the *New Masses* on the history of American labor poetry and Wobbly poetry;⁵³ and Marcus Graham's 1929 *Anthology of Revolutionary Poetry* begins with a section titled "The Forerunners," which includes poetry by Blake, Shelley, Whitman, and William Morris. Nelson concludes, "It is clear that it is possible to

⁵³ See his "Early American Labor and Literature," *International Literature* April 1934: 119-27, rpt. in *New Masses* 5 June 1934: 18-20; and "The Wobbly in American Literature," *New Masses* 12 July 1935: 21-2.

see the explosion of political poetry as part of a long tradition; some poets, moreover, felt it important to see their own work that way" (149).

Not only poets but many of the leading American theorists of proletarianism also considered contemporary literature the inheritor of a long tradition of revolutionary writing. In his introduction to *Proletarian Literature in the United States: An Anthology* (1935), Joseph Freeman argues that "the class concept of literature antedates Stalin, Lenin, and even Marx" (21). Instead of linking proletarianism with the Soviet Union and the growth of the Communist Party, Freeman posits that proletarian literature is as old as the proletariat itself, and "in every epoch, proletarian art is identified with the political movement of the working class" (25). Thus, while revolutionary writers at the time of the publication of *Proletarian Literature in the United States* might affiliate themselves with the Communist Party, this is because the Communist Party was currently the primary revolutionary party. If "during the first two decades of our century, American revolutionary writers were influenced by or directly affiliated with the Socialist Party or the I.W.W." (25), that does not separate their work from that of 1930s proletarians. In order to strengthen his position, Freeman traces the American use of the term "proletarian" back to 1901, when *The Comrade* used the phrase 'proletarian poet' to describe working class writers of verse" (24). Freeman also reminds his readers that Floyd Dell spoke "specifically of *proletarian* literature" in 1919 in the Socialist *Masses*, and he places Michael Gold's 1921 essay "Toward Proletarian Art" within a strictly American context which "continued a tradition as

old as the Socialist movement. Like Edward Markham in 1901, like John Reed in 1916, [Gold] identified the future of art with the struggles of the working class for a new society" (25).⁵⁴ Freeman even suggests that high modernists, such as Pound and Stein, are important predecessors, for they "repudiated the 'eternal values' of traditional poetry and emphasized immediate American experience" (19). Although the selections in *Proletarian Literature in the United States* are exclusively from the late 1920s and early 1930s, Freeman acknowledges that "it would be possible to issue an anthology taking us back to the early works of Jack London and Upton Sinclair, to John Reed, Arturo Giovannitti, and Floyd Dell" (27). Freeman's address to the first American Writers' Congress, "The Tradition of American Revolutionary Literature," retreads much of the same ground as is offered in his introduction to *Proletarian Literature in the United States*, but this address contains a few interesting exhortations absent from that introduction. After quoting from a *Comrade* manifesto which declares the magazine will provide readers "such literary and artistic productions as reflect the soundness of the socialist philosophy. . . . to mirror socialist thought as it finds expression in art and literature . . . and to develop the aesthetic impulse in the Socialist movement" (54), Freeman directs a gibe at Max Eastman when he notes, "You will be convinced that this was no 'Stalinist' plot to

⁵⁴ Gold would seem to concur with Freeman's evaluation. Answering a letter to the editor in *New Masses* which critiques Gold's fondness for the "washed-out and gentle pink" Upton Sinclair, Gold responds, "What if Upton Sinclair were an anarchist, an I.W.W. or an S.L.P. man? Party affiliations are of life and death importance on the political field, but it is almost impossible to approach literature and art in the party spirit" ("On Upton Sinclair" 23).

put American artists in uniform, when I remind you that this was in 1901" (54).

Freeman also stresses the need to comprehend "that we have a revolutionary literary heritage behind us" (58).

Whereas Freeman ventures only as far as the turn of the century for proletarian antecedents, in "Early American Labor and Literature," Alan Calmer traces radical literature in the United States back to the mid-19th century, his first example being from 1837, when "girl workers in New Hampshire . . . struck successfully against a wage-cut proposed by the mill superintendent, composed rhymes satirizing him and posted them on the mill-yard fence" (18-19). Calmer employs a rather broad definition of literature in his presentation of "the splendid revolutionary tradition of the American proletariat" (18), which, in its comprehensiveness, not only includes union anthems, strike ballads, funeral elegies, and verses pencilled on the walls of jail cells but also the practice on the part of labor leaders of quoting pre-existing "literary texts as effective instruments in their speeches and writings" (19).⁵⁵ Although at the beginning of his essay Calmer claims that "it is only today, with the development of the Communist movement, that we can begin to talk of an American proletarian literature that is attaining maturity" (18), "Early American Labor and Literature" does reveal "the development of the indigenous revolutionary tradition of America" (18).

Although Calmer establishes a native history of worker-centered literature

⁵⁵ In Calmer's estimation, German-American socialists produced "the only body of belles-lettres in this country which voiced a strenuous protest against the injustices of American capitalism" (19) during the nineteenth century.

dating back to the mid-18th century, he does not address mainstream canonical literature. Instead, he confines his scope to strike ballads, labor speeches, and "numerous scattered poems, stories, and essays in rare labor newspapers of the time" (Calmer 18). Several commentators, however, did undertake this larger project of viewing all of American literature from a Marxist standpoint in the interest of isolating a radical and class-conscious tradition. The most notable of the monographs produced by such writers are Vernon Louis Parrington's *Main Currents in American Thought* (1927, 1930), V. F. Calverton's *The Liberation of American Literature* (1932), Granville Hicks's *The Great Tradition* (1933, rev. ed. 1935),⁵⁶ and Bernard Smith's *Forces in American Criticism* (1939).⁵⁷

Whereas Calverton, Hicks, and Smith were prominent Marxist critics during the 1920s and 1930s, Parrington's inclusion may seem unusual. "Populist," "progressive," or "liberal" might be better descriptions of Parrington's political orientation and critical methodology,⁵⁸ yet many Marxists embraced *Main Currents*

⁵⁶ Unless otherwise noted, page references will be to the first edition of Hicks's *The Great Tradition*.

⁵⁷ Each of these works differs in scope. Calverton and Hicks comment primarily on narrative prose, poetry, and drama, but while Calverton commences with seventeenth-century Puritan New England, Hicks chooses to begin *The Great Tradition* with the conclusion of the Civil War. Parrington devotes large sections of *Main Currents* to economic and political writers in addition to those who primarily produced creative literature. Smith's *Forces in American Criticism* specifically addresses literary criticism, but most of the figures included in his volume appear in the work of the other three critics as well.

⁵⁸ Parrington seems to have initially preferred to identify his project as "radical" rather than "liberal." Parrington's original title for volume three of *Main Currents* was "The Spirit of Radicalism in Recent American Literature," and, in an

and argued that it was related to their own projects. Although Smith notes the various ways in which *Main Currents* is not fully Marxist, he credits Parrington with having produced the first thoroughly materialist literary history:

Nevertheless, I can state dogmatically that he had some acquaintance with Marxism, had been influenced by it, and knew that his method was related to it. . . . Is not that influence written into the book itself? He did not speak merely of "environments" or vaguely of "economic groupings"; he did not describe a given epoch as a whole, possessing characteristics shared by all who lived in it; he spoke clearly of classes and class struggles. . . . The evidence is strewn throughout the completed parts of the third volume and is confirmed by Professor Eby's statement that Parrington had planned a vindication of Daniel De Leon, Eugene Debs, and Victor Berger. (*Forces in*

unpublished autobiographical sketch, he described the manuscript, "The Democratic Spirit in American Literature: 1620-1870," that would eventually become volumes one and two of *Main Currents* as being "from beginning to end . . . a study in radicalism" (qtd. in H. Lark Hall, *V. L. Parrington: Through the Avenue of Art* [Kent: Kent State UP, 1994] 199). When a reader of the first two volumes of *Main Currents* wrote to Parrington and mused, "Though you mention the word 'liberal' with approval and call yourself one, it is quite obvious that you mean by it 'un--or 'anti-conservative.' Many passages lead me to believe that you mean by it 'radical,'" Parrington responded by agreeing and highlighting his use of "radical" in "The Democratic Spirit in American Literature": "As a matter of fact, in my first draft I used the word radical throughout, and only on revising did I substitute the other." See Hall 199, 235. Oddly, though in his introduction Hofstadter claims Parrington and the other Progressive historians shared "a simple faith . . . in the sufficiency of American liberalism" (*The Progressive Historians* xv), in his second chapter on Parrington, he claims that Parrington "arrived at a generous, undoctinaire, ecumenical radicalism" (429) and his "agrarianism was overlaid with some sympathy for proletarian socialism" and "verges toward anarchism" (430).

American Criticism 333)⁵⁹

One does not have to take Smith's word for this, though. Parrington's study reveals many similarities to those of the more overtly Marxist Calverton, Hicks, and Smith. Among the traits Parrington shares with those later commentators are an economically deterministic conception of the relationship between base and superstructure; a partisanship which favors the work of authors inclined toward socialism, however tenuous that disposition may be, above that of authors who express contentment with feudal, mercantile, or industrial capitalist economies; and the construction of a "usable past" which uncovers a tradition of radical literature dating at least from the Civil War or shortly thereafter.⁶⁰

Parrington's devotion to an economically determinist interrogation of literature

⁵⁹ For a more extensive panegyric on Parrington's *Main Currents*, see Bernard Smith, "Parrington's 'Main Currents in American Thought,'" *Books That Changed Our Minds*, ed. Malcolm Cowley and Bernard Smith (New York: Kelmscott, 1938) 177-91. Apparently, Harcourt, the publisher of both *Main Currents* and *Forces in American Criticism*, also understood the relatedness of Parrington's and Smith's projects, for the back of the dust jacket of the first edition of *Forces in American Criticism* contains a full-page advertisement for *Main Currents*. In contrast to Smith, Granville Hicks considered *Main Currents* flawed, especially the incomplete third volume, though on the whole his evaluation of *Main Currents* is positive. See Hicks's "The Critical Principles of V.L. Parrington," *Science & Society* 3 (1939): 443-60.

⁶⁰ In "On Creating a Usable Past," Van Wyck Brooks asks, "If we need another past so badly, is it inconceivable that we might discover one, that we might even invent one?" (223). While the historians I will be examining would certainly claim that they have discovered rather than invented a tradition of radical American literature, each of their works was politically motivated and perhaps fulfilled pre-existing assumptions about that tradition. As Parrington phrases it, ". . . very likely in my search I have found what I went forth to find, as others have discovered what they were seeking" (*Main Currents* 1: 1).

began long before the appearance of the first two volumes of *Main Currents* in 1927. The American literature courses he taught at the University of Washington frequently stressed the predominance of economic structures over culture, as evidenced by the 1914-15 syllabus for his two-semester sequence on American literature, which proclaimed, "Back of the cultural is the economic; civilization an expression of the master group. Social equality follows economic equality, and social inequality follows economic inequality" (qtd. in Hall 168). A more thorough statement of Parrington's economic determinism appeared in a 1917 essay entitled "Economics and Criticism."⁶¹ In this essay Parrington maintained that "literature is the fair flower of culture, but underneath culture are the deeper strata of philosophy, theology, law, statecraft--of ideology and institutionalism--resting finally upon the subsoil of economics" (qtd. in Hofstadter, *The Progressive Historians* 389).

In *Main Currents*, Parrington's economic determinism manifests itself in a grand narrative of competing economic theories and classes that condition the cultural output of particular eras. When Parrington announces the scope of his project in the first volume of *Main Currents*, he does so by proclaiming, "I have chosen to follow the broad path of our political, economic, and social development, rather than the narrower belletristic; and the main divisions of the study have been fixed by forces that are anterior to literary schools and movements, creating the body of ideas from

⁶¹ Although written in 1917, the essay did not appear in print until 1957. See "Vernon Parrington's View: Economics and Criticism," ed. Vernon L. Parrington, Jr., *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 44 (1953): 97-105. H. Lark Hall believes that the essay was composed as an introduction for the third volume of *Main Currents*, as a means to fend off anticipated criticisms of his method. See Hall 196-97; 322 n.37.

which literary culture eventually springs" (1: iii). Volume one, entitled "The Colonial Mind," begins with the suggestion that "if we will put aside the theology and fasten attention on the politics and the economics of the struggle" (1: 6), we will "regard the Puritan revolution as primarily a rebellion of the capable middle class, whose growing trade interests demanded a larger measure of freedom than a paternal king and a landed aristocracy were willing to grant" (1: 7). Continuing his economic reading of Puritanism, Parrington divides English and colonial religious denominations into political-economic enclaves, whereby Anglicans correspond to Tory feudalists, Presbyterians to Whig capitalist imperialists, and Independents to Democrat Utopian leftists.⁶² Parrington uses such overarching categorization not only to evaluate the antagonisms between sects and individuals in seventeenth-century New England but also to suggest an early foundation for debates between Federalists (or "the English Group") and Jeffersonian Democrats (or "the French Group") which dominates the second half of volume one.

In volume two of *Main Currents*, "The Romantic Revolution in America," which assesses politics, economics, and literature between 1800 and 1860, Parrington

⁶² It should be no surprise that Parrington champions the Independents, particularly the most radical of them, whom he terms Seekers. Among the Seekers he numbers "men like Roger Williams, Sir Harry Vane, Cromwell, and perhaps Milton, outstanding figures of a great age" (1: 10). Speaking of the rivalry between Parliament and the army during the English Commonwealth, Parrington continues:

The left-wing Independents secured control of the army and set about the work of erecting a government that should be a real commonwealth of free citizens. . . . They could strike down their armed enemies in the field, but they could not liberate the minds of men unfit to be free. (1: 10).

constructs a second economic triad based upon geography and "antagonistic imperialisms" (2: v). Parrington separates early nineteenth-century America into three geographical regions, each with a separate economy based upon a distinct type of exploitation. The East "was discovering its Utopia in an industrial capitalistic order" which depended upon "exploiting the Irish immigrant" (2: v); the South "looked forward confidently to a Utopia founded on cotton, and conceived an imperialistic dream of expanding fields of white bolls and black slaves" (2: v); and the "Inland empire was arising an economics . . . equalitarian in temper, decentralizing in impulse; nourished on the idealism of the Declaration of Independence, but interpreting it to mean the natural right of every free citizen to satisfy his acquisitive instinct by exploiting the national resources in the measure of his shrewdness" (2: v-vi).

Although Parrington had not completed volume three of *Main Currents* before his death in 1929 and only portions of this volume are completely fleshed out, Parrington continues an economic and class-centered approach to American literature, for he announces in his introduction that "the theme of the present volume is the industrialization of America under the leadership of the middle class, and the consequent rise of a critical attitude towards the ideals and handiwork of that class" (3: xxvi).

Calverton, in turn, begins his *The Liberation of American Literature* by arguing that though "literature is possessed of an imaginative element which makes it assume forms which are more elusive than economic charts and political

programmes" (xi), nonetheless "the roots of that imagination lie as close to the culture from which they have arisen as do the less imaginative materials of economics and politics" (ix) and, furthermore, "it is only by an appreciation of the class psychologies dominant at the time, as Marx has shown, that we can understand the nature of a culture or the direction and trend of a literature" (xi). In a perhaps even more sweeping assertion of the economic conditioning of literature than Parrington devised, Calverton develops "the colonial complex," a four-stage process by which American authors attempted to create a national literature. Although Calverton begins with a psychological explanation of "the colonial complex," he eventually exposes the economic foundation of this complex:

It would be a mistake, however, to infer that the colonial complex was fundamentally psychological in origin. On the contrary, its origin was entirely economic. It was the economic inferiority of the colonies to England, an inevitable corollary of the colonial status wherever it occurs, that established its existence. Once established, however, its manifestations at once took on a psychological cast, and, deep-rooted as they became, maintained an existence of their own, as we have pointed out, even after the original political and economic conditions had altered. Only at the close of the nineteenth century, when the whole psychology of the nation changed with its newly growing economic superiority, did its hold weaken. To study the colonial complex, therefore, as an economic outgrowth alone, or a

psychological force alone, would be to misunderstand its nature and influence. It is an evolution of both--a psychological outgrowth of the economic basis of the culture. (19-20)

Although Calverton sees the beginnings of a truly American literature unaffected by the colonial complex in frontier literature of the mid- to late-nineteenth century, as it was "a more removed geographic and economic matrix" (27), not until the Spanish American War, when the United States itself became a colonial and world power, did it escape the colonial complex. Calverton does not dwell upon the effects American imperialism had upon American literature, aside from detailing the nationalism of early twentieth-century American culture. Instead, he switches focus and attends to "the inevitable conflicts and contradictions" (364) which arose once the upper bourgeoisie "had captured the political and economic power of the nation" (364). The final sections of *The Liberation of American Literature* are devoted to the literary products of the two classes which came into conflict with the upper bourgeoisie: the petty bourgeoisie, who attempted to preserve individualism, and the proletariat, who, though while initially infected by the individualism of the petty bourgeoisie, are moving toward class consciousness.

Hicks begins his *The Great Tradition* by arguing that with the conclusion of the Civil War and the triumph of industrial capitalism, American literature underwent a massive shift from the idealism of Emerson, Hawthorne, Melville, and Thoreau, who had nothing to say to capitalists or workers, to those who "were wrestling with the problem of evil as it presented itself in concrete economic phenomena" (8).

These figures and others of their era comprised "a tradition that could not be perpetuated in the form in which it had grown, since it was the product of a mode of civilization that was passing and assumed the existence of conditions that each succeeding year after the war helped to destroy" (12). Hicks discovers two figures emerging from this morass who began to deal with industrial capitalism--the youthful James Russell Lowell and Walt Whitman. Although Lowell eventually turned against radicalism, he began by urging "authors to find subjects in 'the steamboat and the rail car, the cornfield and the factory,' and he argued that no poet could achieve greatness without abandoning himself to the spirit of radicalism" (15). Much of the latter half of Hicks's first chapter is given over to how Walt Whitman was the first in the line of writers who embraced the common man and radicalism.

Although Bernard Smith does not, as do the other critics discussed above, begin his work with a grand scheme for what will follow, *Forces in American Criticism* is peppered with economically deterministic arguments throughout, many of which echo points previously made by Parrington, Calverton, and Hicks. For instance, Smith calls "Puritanism . . . the creed of a despised class--the emerging bourgeoisie warring for honor and position against the caste system" (5). In his second chapter, Smith notes that "the growth of economic independence" occasioned by the industrial revolution "brought forth a vigorous nationalism" (23). More importantly, Smith spends significant time detailing the link between bourgeois economic and aesthetic attitudes, claiming that literary criticism of the early nineteenth century "was nothing but an application to esthetics of the utilitarian

philosophy of Bentham and Adam Smith, which is the whole social philosophy of the bourgeoisie" (37). However, the manifestations of this utilitarianism are multiple: literature could serve a moral purpose, could be used as a means to educate the lower classes while simultaneously shifting their class allegiances,⁶³ or could provide a respite from "the significantly painful disturbances that . . . must result, to mind and spirit, from the ordinary conduct of commerce" (45). Ultimately, Smith concentrates his attention on "the inevitable social tendencies accompanying the rise of industrialism" (76) and assesses literary criticism according to which class interests it facilitates.⁶⁴

In addition to holding to an economically deterministic approach to literature and criticism, these four historians are also avowedly partisan in their championship of a left-leaning, or at least democratic, literature. Ultimately, they evaluate literature less by aesthetic standards than by political ones,⁶⁵ and those authors

⁶³ One of the finer moments of *Forces in American Criticism* is the section devoted to *Godey's Lady's Book* and the *McGuffey Readers*, which, in Smith's estimation, served to inculcate "middle-class morality" (63) and "genteel tastes and ideals among the lower classes" (61). See Smith 58-65.

⁶⁴ Unlike Calverton, Smith perceives only a singular bourgeoisie, but by placing the intelligentsia, "bourgeois by birth, tradition, and culture, but . . . distrustful of capitalist industry" (76), between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, he avoids the inclination of Parrington, Calverton, and Hicks to interpret works by reference to the authors' class origins.

⁶⁵ This tendency occasionally produces some unusual choices of primary texts. For instance, in order to depict William Cullen Bryant as a left-wing equalitarian democrat in the mode of William Leggett, Parrington dismisses Bryant's poetry and focuses instead on his journalism, where the "real genius of Bryant" (2: 239) can be found. See *Main Currents* 2: 238-46.

If there is one exception to this "rule" of preferring political over aesthetic

perceived to be politically radical or progressive frequently receive more extensive and positive commentary than those perceived to be conservative or reactionary. This is nowhere more apparent than in Parrington's study. In volume three of *Main Currents*, Walt Whitman receives seventeen pages of treatment and is called "a great figure, the greatest assuredly in our literature" (3: 86), and Parrington concludes, "how shall Walt Whitman become dumb or cease to speak to men unless the children of those who are now half-devil and half-God shall prove to be wholly devil--or wholly moron?" (3: 86). Likewise, in an eleven-page section, William Dean Howells is praised for applying "a shrewd analysis of American life set against a Marxian background" (3: 247) and for his defense of the Haymarket martyrs. However, Henry James barely merits two pages, peppered with remarks such as James "was a self-deceived romantic" (3: 240) who engaged in "a lifelong pursuit of intangible realities that existed only in his imagination" (3: 240) and who "remained shut up within his own skull-pan" (3: 241).⁶⁶ In contrast, both Hicks and Smith devote

standards, it is Calverton. Although Calverton would maintain that the best literature emerges from and espouses a revolutionary point of view, such partisanship itself does not constitute great literature. Though he appreciates Upton Sinclair's detailed portraits of workers' lives and conditions, he perceives in Sinclair a single-mindedness of purpose which caused the novelist to conceive first of an argument he wanted to make, and his characters, then, were merely puppets used to illustrate his theses. In the section of *The Liberation of American Literature* in which Calverton discusses proletarian literature and American Marxist literary journals, he faults the *New Masses* for "fail[ing] to realize that proletarian art as well as bourgeois art has to be art if it is to be significant" (458). A few pages later, Calverton restates this argument in a much beloved phrase which would reappear in his later criticism: "*Revolutionary art has to be good art first before it can have deep meaning*, just as apples in a revolutionary country as well as in a reactionary country have to be good apples before they can be eaten with enjoyment" (460).

⁶⁶ The brevity of Parrington's evaluation of James could be due to the fact that

extensive coverage to Henry James, praising his artistry and criticism, but they conclude that his aestheticism is a closed circuit impervious to economic and social concerns, thus rendering his work beautiful but useless.⁶⁷ Calverton's apparent disdain for Henry James was so extreme that he does not even mention him in *The Liberation of American Literature*.

While by no means, then, do these critics all agree upon the value of any particular author, several figures recur prominently, either to be celebrated or to have their proletarianism called into question. The most notable of these figures are Walt Whitman, W. D. Howells, Hamlin Garland, Frank Norris, Jack London, and Upton Sinclair. Since these historians do not agree upon the supposed radicalism of any of these authors, nor do they agree upon the value these authors have for contemporary readers, one could argue that each historian constructs a distinct and separate radical usable past dependent upon the historian's definition of what constitutes literary radicalism as well as upon that historian's individual tastes. One can also detect an

Parrington had not completed volume three of *Main Currents* at the time of his death, but the section on James does not appear in note form as do the sections on Jack London, Upton Sinclair, and Edith Wharton. Furthermore, there is precedent for such a terse judgment of a major figure in American literary history. In volume two, Parrington devotes barely more than two pages to Edgar Allan Poe.

⁶⁷ Smith's assessment of James might be taken as symptomatic of these historians' rejection of seemingly apolitical literature overall:

Now, too, we can put our finger on the reason why many people have found no real enlightenment in James's critical essays. Because there was nothing he wanted to fight for besides artistry, because he had no purposes or ends, he did not deal with the ultimate things for which men go to literature. (219)

eclecticism on the part of these nativist critics corresponding to the eclecticism of critics writing for the leftist American press who often borrowed positions from diverse and conflicting Soviet literary and theoretical movements. If critics and historians from the twenties and thirties could not agree upon a "Party," *New Masses*, or even a vaguely radical American line, then it is unlikely that any single description of creative proletarian literature will suffice. Rather, proletarian literature should be understood on a case-by-case basis through an interrogation of the particular influences upon individual authors. Such an approach can account for all three supposed "causes" of proletarian literature detailed in this chapter--economic, theoretical, and nativist--and can weigh the relative force of each "cause" in the production of a particular text or an author's radicalization. The remainder of this dissertation will explore the impact diverse radical influences had upon the proletarian novels of Michael Gold, Olive Tilford Dargan and the other Gastonia novelists, and John Dos Passos.

CHAPTER 2

Michael Gold

Despite the enormous popularity of *Jews Without Money* (1930)¹ and Michael Gold's status as one of the leading proponents of proletarian art, culture, and literature, his fictionalized autobiography² met with stern opposition from American

¹ According to Michael Folsom, *Jews Without Money* went through eleven editions within the first eight months of its publication and was reprinted fourteen more times within the next twenty years. See "Introduction," *Mike Gold: A Literary Anthology*, ed. Michael Folsom (New York: International, 1972) 15; "The Book of Poverty," *Nation* 28 Feb. 1966: 242-45. By Gold's own count, *Jews Without Money* had been translated into fifteen languages by 1935, including languages as diverse as Bohemian, Bulgarian, and Tartar (Gold, "Author's Note" 11).

² Folsom objects to *Jews Without Money* being labeled "autobiography," even though the book "is, by Gold's guess, about 85 per cent autobiography" ("The Book of Poverty" 243), yet he also maintains that it "is *not* a novel" (243). Rather, he considers the work "a miscellany of vignettes, anecdotes, reflections, sketches" (243). In contrast, Richard Tuerk claims that *Jews Without Money* "is, in fact, the end product of much revision, and it often comes closer to fiction than fact" ("*Jews Without Money* as a Work of Art" 68). Among the divergences from Gold's biography that Tuerk notes are that the narrator of the book is called Mikey, whereas Gold was born Itzok Granich and did not adopt the pseudonym "Michael Gold" until 1919; that Gold had two brothers, only one of whom is mentioned briefly in *Jews Without Money*; and that "Gold's real-life father and unlike the father in the book, is a small manufacturer" (68-69). More importantly, Gold began working on the book as early as 1917, thirteen years before its complete publication, at the time when he published "Birth: A Prologue to a Tentative East Side Novel" in the November-December issue of the *Masses*. See John Pyros, *Mike Gold: Dean of American Proletarian Writers* (New York: Dramatika, 1979) iii, 4, and 12. Several sketches which would later become chapters of *Jews Without Money* appeared in *American Mercury*, *Masses*, *New Masses*, and *New York Call* throughout the 1910s and 20s. Frequently, these previously published chapters were altered significantly before inclusion within *Jews Without Money*, many of those revisions involving a departure from Gold's biography. See Tuerk, "*Jews Without Money*" 68-77. Pyros notes

leftist critics. The prevalence of leftist criticisms of *Jews Without Money* is particularly confusing considering that Gold published one of the first manifestos calling for proletarianism in American literature,³ continued producing essays on proletarianism throughout the 1920s and 1930s, and edited or wrote for many of the major Marxist and socialist periodicals from the 1910s until his death in 1967.⁴ Those critiques might suggest that Gold could not, within his own creative work, fulfill the terms which he and others had set for proletarian literature. However, those criticisms, especially when weighed against Gold's own comments on literature throughout the 1920s, may also reveal central disputes between Gold and other advocates of a left-wing American literature over the authorship, content, and craft of proletarian texts.

Gold's similar process of continual revision of the short story "A Damned Agitator," first published in the *New York Call* in 1917. See Pyros 13, though Pyros's claim that "A Damned Agitator" was, in 1925, "translated into Russian as 'Faster, America Faster,'" (14-15) seems highly unlikely, for "Faster, America, Faster!" was the title of a completely unrelated Gold piece not published until November 1926 in the *New Masses*.

Unfortunately, many of those who attempt to construct a biographical account of Gold's early years rely upon *Jews Without Money* and subsequent pieces, such as "A Jewish Childhood in the New York Slums," whereas there are clear indications that Gold did not intend these works to be taken as autobiographical fact. Rather, Gold drew upon his own experiences and then developed them into artistic and polemic constructs. Thus, I use the term "fictional autobiography" to indicate this process.

³ See [Irwin Granich], "Towards Proletarian Art," *Liberator* 4 (Feb. 1921): 20-24.

⁴ In addition to editing the *Liberator* and the *New Masses*, Gold wrote a regular column entitled "Change the World" for the *Daily Worker* and published occasional pieces in the *Masses*, the *New York Call*, *People's World*, and the *San Francisco Call*.

"When I think it is the tenement thinking": Towards Experiential Art

The major flaws of *Jews Without Money* cited by American Marxist critics are that the novel does not focus on members of the proletariat and that it does not present a pervasive analysis of the means by which poverty is created and sustained within the United States.⁵ Although J. Q. Neets (a pseudonym of Joshua Kunitz), in a 1930 review published in Gold's own magazine, the *New Masses*, called *Jews Without Money* a "book of remarkable reminiscences" (15), he considered it far from proletarian, for "Mike seems to ignore the fact that not every Jew without money is necessarily a proletarian. Nor does he seem to realize that a writer's sentimental outpourings over the sorrows of the insulted and injured do not always indicate a proletarian outlook" (15). In another 1930 review, Melvin P. Levy claimed that "the characters are not proletarians (though [Gold] wants them to be): they are merely poor people" (161) and noted that "labor organization and strikes . . . are not mentioned--nor are the great shirtwaist strike and the Triangle fire" (161).⁶ Levy concludes that Gold's work lacks the scope and requisite economic determinism

⁵ Ironically, though, according to Deming Brown, Gold "was by and large the most respected American proletarian writer in the early thirties" (71) in the Soviet Union, numerous Soviet critics faulted *Jews Without Money* for sacrificing individual characterization in the interest of presenting class "truth." However, unlike their American counterparts, Soviet critics found Gold's work suitably proletarian. See Brown, *Soviet Attitudes Toward American Writing* 71-72.

⁶ Although neither the shirtwaist strike nor the Triangle fire is mentioned in *Jews Without Money*, labor organizing and strikes do make brief appearances: Dr. Solow encourages a patient to join a union (233); the narrator's Aunt Lena is involved in a strike and, as a result, is attacked by "[t]wo Italian gangsters and an Irish policeman" (237); the narrator's mother organizes a rent strike (249-50); and the novel concludes with an IWW.-led unemployment demonstration (309).

essential to characterization within a proletarian novel, for *Jews Without Money* does not depict "whole classes of people caught up in the circumstances of their time, particularly the economic circumstances" but instead shows that the "failures [of the major characters] and their desires are not inevitable: they are individual accidents" (161). Even Gold's colleague Granville Hicks argued that Gold "acquired many of the ideas and attitudes of the bourgeoisie," which ideas and attitudes manifest themselves in his autobiography, "and as a result we are not prepared for the conversion to socialism with which *Jews Without Money* ends" (*The Great Tradition*, 2nd ed. 300).⁷

Gold answered some of these charges at length in a letter to the *New Republic* entitled, provocatively, "A Proletarian Novel?" Gold defended, in particular, his choice of subject matter in *Jews Without Money* by suggesting that the value of a work of literature is proportional to the degree to which that work reflects the experiences and environment of the writer:

To my mind, it is the task of each proletarian writer to describe that portion of proletarian life with which he is most saturated. It is such an immense new field that he simply cannot cover it all; he

⁷ More severe criticisms include Alfred Kazin's charges of virtual illiteracy (he calls Gold "not very bright" and "as primitive as his material"); Walter Rideout's suggestion that Gold is a "man with strong impulses and sympathies, but without . . . the capacity for sustained artistic vision;" and V. F. Calverton's claim that "Gold is not a logical, dialectical thinker" regardless of his choice of medium. See Kazin, "Introduction," *Jews Without Money*, by Michael Gold (New York: Carroll and Graf, 1996): 1-7, qtd. 4, 2; Rideout, *The Radical Novel* 187; and Calverton, *The Liberation of American Literature* 463.

cannot even do as he ought, but as he must. Comrade Levy's complaint is obscure even to himself, but I think that he expected me to write a novel about a strike in a steel mill or in some other heavy industry. He is disappointed because I wrote about tenement-house Jewish workers instead, and in writing of them did not include the Triangle fire and the great garment strikes.

Yet I could do nothing else honestly and emotionally at the time. I could only describe what I had seen with my own eyes. I did not want to falsify emotional values, and bring in material that I did not feel. I do not believe any good writing can come out of this mechanical application of the spirit of proletarian literature. In America, where everything is confused, we must begin humbly with the things we know best. (74)

This emphasis upon recording one's own experiences was not created by Gold merely to fend off critics of this novel but had been a consistent thread of his theory of proletarian art since his first formulation of proletarianism as a distinct genre in his 1921 *Liberator* manifesto "Towards Proletarian Art."⁸ This essay argues that art

⁸ Azar Naficy traces several of the prominent arguments operating within "Towards Proletarian Art" back to one of Gold's first published pieces, "Groups," which appeared in the August 1916 issue of *The Flame*, a short-lived anarchist-Bohemian journal Gold and Van Kleek Allison co-edited. See Naficy 67-73. Although Naficy recognizes "tendencies in this essay such as his near-worship of instinct, his desire and yearning for community and his deep hatred of the intellectual 'dilettantes,' [which] were later developed and incorporated into Gold's formulation of proletarian literature" (70), the "groups" Gold singles out for praise are not categorically proletarian.

is necessarily the product of experiences and environment; thus, proletarian art can only be produced by members of the proletariat, although Gold employs a broad definition of the proletariat. Michael Folsom alleges that "when Gold spoke his faith in and commitment to the 'poor,' he meant the working class; we make a distinction" ("The Education of Michael Gold" 250), but it would seem that when Gold spoke of the proletariat, he meant the poor, regardless of whether they were working-class or potentially petit bourgeois. "Towards Proletarian Art" also demonstrates that Gold's definition of the proletariat did not restrict this class designation to industrial workers. For instance, Gold mentions the word "tenement" sixteen times in "Towards Proletarian Art." In contrast, the words "worker(s)," "factory," "strike," "boycott," "organization," and "agitation" appear only sporadically throughout the essay. Although Gold uses the words "mass" and "masses" twenty-one times in the same essay, he never suggests that "masses" applies solely to industrial workers, for his first expression of mass solidarity and consciousness appears in an autobiographical section on his tenement childhood:

The tenement is in my blood. When I think it is the tenement thinking. When I hope it is the tenement hoping. I am not an individual; I am all that the tenement group poured into me during those early years of my spiritual travail. (21)

This rejection of individuality in favor of an environmentally produced collective identity is an essential component of Gold's theorization that the possibilities of literature, and culture overall, are circumscribed by economic class.

Whereas other advocates of proletarianism might argue that art manifests the inherent ideology of the artist and, therefore, revolutionary art could only be produced by those who have achieved a revolutionary consciousness, Gold maintains that art is not the product of consciousness but of environment. In fact, Gold's distinctions between "bourgeois" and "proletarian" literature, and the truth-value that each possesses, hinge upon a dichotomous positioning of the artist as either isolated from or immersed within a community. By Gold's definition, bourgeois art is individualistic and solitary, whereas proletarian art maintains a loyalty to the proletarian's community:

The elder artists have all been sick. They have 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. We artists of the people will not face Life and Eternity alone. We will face it among the people. (21)

The danger of such isolation from community, according to Gold, is that the literary effort not based upon direct experience and observation threatens to descend into an obsession with producing beautiful artifices that protect bourgeois ideologies, through elision, against contradictory material "truths." Characteristically, Gold relies upon his childhood to confute the picture of life presented to him by such literary artists:

In the tenement Man was revealed to me, Man, who is Life speaking.

I saw him, not as he has been pictured by the elder poets, groveling or

sinful or romantic or falsely god-like, but one sunk in a welter of humble, realistic cares; responsible, instinctive, long-suffering and loyal; sad and beaten yet reaching out beautifully and irresistibly like a natural force for the mystic food and freedom that are Man's. (20)

We might say, then, that in "Towards Proletarian Art" Gold evaluates art based upon the criterion of mimesis or realism, but this criterion is further limited by Gold's emphases upon environment and community. As the human condition arises from material conditions, art which would present the human condition accurately must be mimetic, but mimesis holds true only for those who directly experience that which they render artistically and for those whose experience is, in turn, rendered artistically by members of their community.⁹ Gold's very language stresses an

⁹ Gold's *New Masses* colleague Joseph Freeman also developed a class-specific experiential theory of art in his introduction to *Proletarian Literature in the United States*:

The best art deals with specific experiences which arouse specific emotion in specific people at a specific moment in a specific locale, in such a way that other people who have had similar experiences in other places and times recognize it as their own. (13)

For some reason, Max Eastman, in his memoir *Love and Revolution*, chooses to portray Freeman as originally a member of the bourgeoisie, the child of "parents [who] were . . . Jews *With Money*, and his approach to the proletarian revolution was different from Mike Gold's. He climbed down, you might say, whereas Mike climbed up to the platform on which they joined hands and efforts" (270; original emphasis). Although Freeman did attend Columbia and his father would eventually become quite wealthy, his childhood experiences were very similar to Gold's. After emigrating with his family from the Ukraine at age seven, he lived "in a poverty-stricken Brooklyn ghetto" within "a world of bearded patriarchs, pushcarts, and street fights" (Aaron, *Writers on the Left* 69). Furthermore, according to Daniel Aaron, his "conversion" to socialism occurred during his early teenaged years, long before "his father's real estate business had begun to pick up. . . . and he had nothing but contempt for moneyed success" (69-70).

Similarly, Floyd Dell questioned Gold's proletarian status. Dell declares that

ownership of culture based upon economics, environment, and profession:

Why should we artists born in tenements go beyond them for our expression? Can we go beyond them? "Life burns in both camps," in the tenements and in the palaces, but *can we understand that which is not our very own?* We, who are sprung from the workers, can so easily forget the milk that nourished us, and the hearts that gave us growth? Need we apologize or be ashamed if we express in art *that*

"Comrade Mike is a member of the middle class" (25) in his 1922 *Liberator* essay "Explanations and Apologies," although this categorization is based upon Dell's argument that "any one is a member of the middle class who gets a salary instead of wages" even if that "salary may be, and frequently is, smaller than the wages" (25). Although ostensibly a critique of those on the editorial staff of the *Liberator* who would "deny vehemently" (25) that they were members of the middle class, "Explanations and Apologies" ultimately is a defense of the middle class. Dell not only confesses that "I most emphatically do not wish to become like those proletarian heroes that Mike has been telling us about" (26) but also extrapolates that industrial workers "will become more like the existing middle class. That is what they want to be--like the middle class" (26).

Eastman's and Dell's assessments of Freeman and Gold reveal the schism that occurred among the *Liberator*'s editors when Gold proposed that the magazine encourage and publish work produced by, rather than being merely sympathetic toward, members of the proletariat. Max Eastman, in reflecting upon 1921, the year when Gold began urging the *Liberator*'s editorial staff "to go out into the farms and factories, not omitting also the slums and gutters, and find talented working men and women who would produce a really 'proletarian' art and literature" (*Love and Revolution* 267), labeled Gold "a zealot, a being alien to the basic temper of the magazine" (267) and put into Lenin's mouth his own opinion that such practice is "Bunk!" (267). In "Explanations and Apologies," Floyd Dell argued that radical intellectuals can "write better articles or draw better pictures dealing with the miners than the miners themselves can" (25). Most dramatically, Claude McKay resigned from the *Liberator* staff when, in his own words, Gold sought to turn the monthly into "a popular proletarian magazine, printing doggerel from lumberjacks and stevedores and true revelations from chambermaids" (*A Long Way from Home* 139-40), and, according to Daniel Aaron, his and Gold's "differences almost ended in a fist fight" (*Writers on the Left* 93).

manifestation of Life which is so exclusively ours, the life of the toilers? (21; emphasis added)

Given his assumption that artistic expression is conditioned by the economic class of the artist, it should come as no surprise that Gold concludes "Towards Proletarian Art" with a celebration of the Soviet Proletkults and his hope that the United States will imitate their experiments:

When there is singing and music rising in every American street, when in every American factory there is a drama group of the workers, when mechanics paint in their leisure, and farmers write sonnets, the greater art will grow and only then. (24)

When Gold assumed sole editorship of *New Masses* in 1928, he tried to convert the magazine into such an organ for proletarian experiential writing, imploring that "the working men, women, and children of America . . . do most of the writing in the New Masses" ("Write for Us!" 2), and subsequent essays by Gold continue this advocacy of experiential and instinctual writing. "Go Left, Young Writers!" (1929) returns to the thesis, stated eight years earlier in "Towards Proletarian Art," that environment, material conditions, and the worker-writer are virtually interchangeable, for not only does environment condition the writer but, ideally, the writer serves as an unself-conscious voicebox of a particular community and its daily existence. Thus, Gold claims that the proletarian does not rely upon any theories of art but merely records experiences:

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. (188-89)

Just as Gold's colleagues at the *Liberator* had taken issue with his championship of proletarian literature, some contributors to *New Masses* considered Gold's emphasis upon instinct in proletarian literature at the expense of a study of previously existing literature misguided.¹⁰ In the review article "Upton Sinclair and Thornton Wilder"¹¹ (*New Masses*, May 1930), J. Q. Neets agrees with Gold that "Wilder's ideology [is] utterly reactionary" (18) but nevertheless praises the novelist's "superb structure, his economy of means, his crystalline style. We too need literary craftsmanship, technique" (18). Drawing the analogy that "proletarian builders do not reject the industrial technique evolved by a Ford, they adopt it" (18), Neets concludes that "a wise proletarian does not pooh-pooh the very real technical

¹⁰ More recently, Azar Naficy has noted that this tendency "towards idolization of instinct at the expense of intellect was Gold's literary Achilles' Heel, and to the last it remained with him. . . . in the early twenties it led to an adoration of primitivism; while in trying to be scientific, in reality it stood opposed to science" (159). Although arguing that "Gold's view of instinct as opposed to craftsmanship at times borders on an obscuring dualism" (Naficy 159), Naficy proposes that "part of Gold's insistence upon instinct stemmed from reaction to the prevailing over-emphasis upon craft" (160).

¹¹ This review was published amid a series of attacks by Gold upon Wilder in the *New Masses* in 1930 and which would culminate in Gold's 22, October 1930 *New Republic* essay "Wilder: Prophet of the Genteel Christ." For background on the Gold-Wilder controversy, see Daniel Aaron, *Writers on the Left* 237-43.

achievement of the bourgeois writer. He attempts first to master it, and then to transcend it. . . . We must learn from the bourgeoisie just as the bourgeoisie had once learned from the aristocracy" (18). The following month, Gold appended an editorial to the letters section of the *New Masses* and responded to Neets's charges. Gold wavers between arguing that "style and content are one" (22), leaving readers to intuit that imitation of the style of bourgeois writers will result in a bourgeois text, and dismissing the question of style altogether, as if it were simply the creation of bourgeois litterateurs. Indeed, Gold fears that an emphasis upon study of masterful texts will prevent any new literary developments, such as proletarianism, though this fear is expressed through the assumption that each writer has an innate personal style: "Would you tell a young Jack London to give up his own natural instincts and make himself over in the image of a William Dean Howells?" (22). For Gold, it is the case that proletarian writers need only to practice their own craft rather than imitate predecessors:

There is no "style"--there is only clarity, force, truth in writing. If a man has something new to say, as all proletarian writers have, he will learn to say it clearly in time: if he writes long enough. (22)

Gold would subsequently appeal to the readership of *New Masses* to reject bourgeois models of literature and instead to celebrate the elements of their lives and environments which were distinctly proletarian. In his September 1930 editorial "Notes of the Month," Gold once again proclaims a class-based ownership of culture and admonishes proletarians to "write with the courage of our own experience" (5):

I mean, if one is a tanner and writer, let one dare to write the drama of a tannery; or of a clothing shop, or of a ditch-digger's life, or of a hobo. Let the bourgeois writers tell us about their spiritual drunkards and super-refined Parisian emigres; or about their spiritual marriages and divorces, etc., that is *their* world; we must write about *our* own mud-puddle; it will prove infinitely more important. (5; emphasis added)

This cult of experience exhibits itself in *Jews Without Money* as a seeming rejection of all existent literature. At one point the narrator declares, "There are enough pleasant superficial liars writing in America. I will write a truthful book of Poverty; I will mention bedbugs" (71). *Jews Without Money* mentions far more than bedbugs; it assaults readers with a deluge of images and descriptions of prostitution, child molestation, domestic violence, gang violence, violence toward animals, accidental deaths, racism, evictions, starvation, and garbage-clogged streets. Although this focus upon the seamiest of tenement realities in the interest of exposing "truth" might seem to place Gold among other naturalists such as Frank Norris and Upton Sinclair, in critical pieces Gold maintained that Norris and Sinclair wrote from perspectives and for audiences different from their subject matter. Since their writing could not be considered "experiential" or "intuitive," not only did their works risk losing some truth-value, they also risked belittling or dehumanizing the classes

and individuals depicted in their novels.¹² Gold lauds Norris's *The Octopus* in "O Californians! O Ladies and Gentleman!" but claims that Norris wrote his novels "with one eye on the censor--the genteel prune-rancher's Iowan wife" (123), and he concludes that "*McTeague* is artificial; it is the novel of a slummer and tourist; it is not the life of the poor, or the underworld; it is a stunt" (123). Similarly, Gold's one criticism of Sinclair in the otherwise celebratory essay "In Foggy California" is the "faint trace of the Protestant minister that I can't enjoy" (169). According to Gold, Sinclair's advocacy of radical causes to middle-class readers often caused him to whitewash workers and the impoverished as paragons of virtue:

There is nobility in the revolutionary camp; there is also gloom, dirt and disorder. The worker is not a bright radiant legend like one of Walter Crane's Merrie [sic] England peasants. The worker is a man.

We don't need to edit him. Let us not shirk our problems. Let us not

¹² James R. Giles concurs that in such works of American naturalism as Norris's *McTeague*, Stephen Crane's *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*, Jack London's *The People of the Abyss*, and Jacob Riis's *How the Other Half Lives*, there exists "a clear separation between narrative voice and subject matter" (47) and that as "an almost inevitable result of such narrative detachment, these four works are marked by varying degrees of dehumanization in the characterizations of their central subjects" (48). Whereas these naturalists catered to the pity, prejudices, or prurient interest of middle-class readers, "Gold's implied working-class reader should respond to his account . . . with a personal and immediate sense of outrage" (Giles 59) due to the familiarity, rather than the otherness, of its details. See Giles's *The Naturalistic Inner-City Novel in America: Encounters with the Fat Man* (Columbia: U of South Carolina P, 1995): 47-70. Naficy notes another distinction between Gold's treatment of the impoverished and that to be found in naturalist texts. Whereas some naturalists considered human actions the result of biological determinism, Gold established economic determinism as the primary causal factor: "Gold's characters are drawn the way they are, not because of any inherent traits as some naturalists had claimed, but because they had to survive" (28).

rob the worker of his humanity in fiction. Not every worker is like Jesus; there are Hamlets, Othellos, Tom Joneses and Macbeths among them, too. And I prefer this variety of life to abstractions. (169)¹³

The narrator of *Jews Without Money* echoes Gold's distinction between naturalism and "a truthful book of Poverty" when he assumes that any literary text is a fiction which does not describe conditions as they are but as the writer chooses to present them for a particular audience. Hence, when a teacher presented the narrator with a volume of Emerson's essays, he thanked "her for the book, and threw it under the bed when I got home. I never read a page in it or in any book for the next five years. I hated books; they were lies, they had nothing to do with life and work" (304-05).

However, to take this last profession outside of context is to miss the energy and complexity of the attack upon literature in *Jews Without Money*. The narrator does not reject books for being lies but, rather, decides that they are lies because he, being poor and unable to further his education, has been shut out of the life of the mind. For instance, just a few sentences before his diatribe against books, the

¹³ Despite RAPP's directive that proletarian writers should depict "living persons," including all their contradictions, apparently Gold was too willing to expose reactionary tendencies among workers for some Soviet critics' tastes. In "A Damned Agitator," intrafamily disputes, nationalism, racism, and religion combine to impede the progress of a strike led by Polish-Americans. Interestingly enough, in this story it is Russian-Americans, under the sway of a priest and a capitulating leader, who threaten to abandon the strike. One Soviet critic faulted the story for its "inability to show the organized workers' movement of revolutionary proletarians" (N. Eishiskina qtd. in Deming Brown 69). Similarly, Mary Heaton Vorse's novel *Strike!* was found to lack the requisite solidarity among workers (Brown 69).

narrator acknowledges, "I was trying to be hard. For years my ego had been fed by everyone's praise of my precocity. I had always loved books; I was mad about books; I wanted passionately to go to high school and college. Since I couldn't, I meant to despise all that nonsense" (304).

The Class and Gender Divisions of Literary Labor

One danger of taking Gold at his word when he celebrates experience and intuition at the expense of literary craft and tradition is that one could construe, as Alfred Kazin has, that Gold was "a 'primitive' who never wrote anything of value" ("Introduction" 2), "a man without the slightest literary finesse, without second thoughts on anything he believes, without any knowledge of Jewish life apart from the Lower East Side" (3-4), and "not very bright" (4). Such emphasis on Gold's hostility toward existent literature also ignores his frequent veneration of select American, English, Russian, and Yiddish writers. To cite just one example, previous to his lone criticism of Sinclair in "In Foggy California," Gold lauds Sinclair's novels, claiming "everyone of them is written with passion, observation, and a smooth beautiful skill that reminds one of Defoe, of Dickens, of Tolstoy, all the giants of fiction whose pens flowed with large, easy grandeur" (169). Interestingly, when Gold does criticize Sinclair for excising the greed, violence, and folly of the poor, he does so through reference to fictional characters. Gold's apparent rejection of literature should not be taken, then, at face value, for it is not a wholesale rejection of literature per se; rather, it is a rejection of the exclusivity of

literature within a capitalist economy. Throughout *Jews Without Money* and within a few earlier stories, Gold develops a corollary between the culturally disenfranchised and the alienation of workers from the products of their labor. In this cultural corollary, workers, the impoverished, and, in *Jews Without Money*, especially women of those economic classes experience total alienation: they are not only excluded from literary consumption but also from literary production. Gold postulates that this cultural exclusion arises because leisure is necessary for a pursuit of the arts, a leisure afforded to the bourgeoisie through the labor of the very classes who are then excluded from those same artistic pursuits. As he phrases it in one essay, "The middle class of America is building a country club civilization, and if you haven't any money, you don't belong" ("O Californians! O Ladies and Gentlemen!" 123).

More than likely, personal experience played a significant role in Gold's formation of these conclusions. Gold's original formulation of a proletarian literature predates the Great Depression by nearly a decade, so the "economic crisis" explanation of American proletarianism forwarded by Kazin would seem not to apply to Gold, but if we were to broaden Kazin's theory of causation to include all economic crises, whether widespread or personal, then certainly such crises could be considered both catalysts for and formative influences upon Gold's proletarian criticism and fiction. In fact, Gold dates the onset of his radical literary career from an IWW.-led demonstration during the 1914 "unemployment crisis" ("How I Came to Communism" 9), though equally if not more important are the individual economic

crises he encountered both previous to and after this moment.

Although one should hesitate to draw direct parallels between *Jews Without Money* and Gold's own autobiography, there are striking similarities between the narrator's and Gold's experiences of being shut off from a life of books. As is the case of the narrator of *Jews Without Money*, Gold's academic career was interrupted when his father became ill and could not work. Gold was the valedictorian of his 1905 graduating class from P.S. 20 in Manhattan (Pyros iii, 4), but when he was twelve, in order to support his family after his father became disabled, he "was forced to leave school and work in the hot hell of a New York factory making the gas-mantles of the time" (Gold qtd. in Folsom, "The Education of Mike Gold" 224). Gold adds, "Whatever education I later acquired was paid for with sweat and confusion" (qtd. in Folsom 224). Later, Gold attempted to further his education at C.C.N.Y. "at a night school supposed to cram you with a high school degree in a tenth of the usual time" (qtd. in Folsom 225). However, Gold notes that the acquisition of a formal education by a worker at this time was virtually impossible:

I had to pay tuition for two months in advance. But I never finished the two months. I was working then for an express company [Adams], out in the streets on a wagon 12 hours a day. When I sat down in the hot classroom at night I simply couldn't keep my eyes open. Night after night I simply couldn't keep my eyes open. Night after night I slept through it all, until in a final humiliation, again I quit my struggle for an education. (qtd. in Folsom 225)

Naficy comments that this class-based deprivation "of both the leisure and the access to enjoy the cultural and intellectual activities which he so badly desired. . . . frustrated, [Gold's] passion for literature and art" (40). In fact, it caused Gold, for a brief period, as is true for the narrator of *Jews Without Money*, to reject literature out of bitterness and exhaustion. Reflecting in 1932 upon his early adulthood, Gold wrote, "I had not read a single book in five years; nothing except the sporting page of newspapers" ("How I Came to Communism" 9).

For Gold, one appeal of radical economic movements is that, if successful, they would provide workers with access to educational materials and time for study. Gold dates his literary re-immersion from an April 1914 IWW.-led unemployment demonstration in Union Square, the very same demonstration which concludes *Jews Without Money*. Speaking of the effect of his being beaten by a policeman when he attempted to assist a woman who had been clubbed by the same policeman, Gold wrote, "Now I grew so bitter because of that cop that I went around to the anarchist Ferrer School and discovered books--I discovered history, poetry, science, and the class struggle" ("How I Came to Communism" 9). According to Michael Folsom, Gold purchased "his first copy of the revolutionary *Masses* magazine" (*Mike Gold* 12) at this demonstration, and four months later he published the prose poem "Three Whose Hatred Killed Them" in the August 1914 issue of the *Masses*.¹⁴ Gold's literary career clearly dates from this moment, for within the next several years he

¹⁴ The only work Gold published before "Three Whose Hatred Killed Them" were poems or stories printed in an East Side settlement house newsletter (Folsom, *Mike Gold* 22).

moved from the East Side to Greenwich Village, continued to publish work in the *Masses* and wrote plays for the Provincetown Players, adopted Max Eastman and Floyd Dell as his mentors, worked as a reporter for the *Boston Journal* and later the New York socialist daily *Call*, and eventually became editor of the *Liberator* in 1921 and the *New Masses* in 1928 (Folsom, *Mike Gold* 12-15).

However, before his success, just after this 1914 moment of rebirth, Gold's renewed literary and revolutionary fervor could not provide tools with which to eliminate the discord between economic necessity and educational availability. At the urging of Lewis Mumford and other students at C.C.N.Y. who were matriculating at Harvard, Gold borrowed money from relations and entered Harvard in 1914 as a provisional student (Folsom, "Education" 225). Although, according to Michael Folsom, Harvard provided Gold with "everything he most desired: knowledge, discipline, and a sense of intellectual achievement" (226), Gold could not overcome the financial hurdles which separated the impoverished from a formal education. His weekly salary of fifteen dollars from the *Boston Journal* for writing a daily column entitled "A Freshman at Harvard" was simply not enough to cover expenses, and "[b]y mid-semester Gold was selling his books and clothes, living on doughnuts" (226), with the result that "before the end of the semester he was out of school and work, wrestling with a nervous breakdown" (226). As Folsom would have it, "his formal education was finished, and he was finished with it" (226).

Two of Gold's stories from the 1920s reflect this disenchantment with bourgeois education and culture as well as clearly establishing a relationship between

the production of capital through workers' labor and their exclusion from a pursuit of the arts which depends upon that capital. These stories also depict a variety of responses on the part of workers to their exclusion from intellectual endeavors, including insanity, wholesale rejection of bourgeois culture, and suicidal depression.

Gold's 1928 short story "Love on a Garbage Dump" begins with such a rejection of bourgeois intellectual and cultural institutions when the narrator claims, "Certain enemies have spread the slander that I once attended Harvard college. This is a lie. I worked on the garbage dump in Boston, city of Harvard. But that's all" (177). Although there is little reason to believe that the first-person narrator is Gold himself, his disillusionment with and antagonism toward bourgeois culture parallels that experienced by Gold.¹⁵ Gold includes several portraits of "intellectuals among the workers" who became "freaks and madmen" (180) when denied aspirations open to others with more capital in order to represent the denial of education as a widespread phenomenon and to suggest a metaphor--that the workers at the dump are themselves treated as refuse, scrambling to grab any elements of culture discarded by the wealthy, though their menial labor enables the wealthier classes more leisure to

¹⁵ Michael Folsom suggests that "Love on a Garbage Dump" illustrates better than any other story that "Gold often lacked a clear sense of the distinction between fiction and autobiographical fact" (*Mike Gold* 177). However, Folsom maintains that "Gold considered the story fiction" (177):

On first publication he subtitled it "32nd attempt at a short story," and there is little in the story which is autobiographically exact. Gold did work on the Boston dump for a week or two, but that was hardly "all" he did in the Boston area. He was twenty-one or twenty-two at the time, not nineteen. The characters in the story are more or less fancied; the women especially are types, not real individuals. (177)

pursue their intellectual and artistic inclinations. After generally describing the dump, Gold underscores this relationship by having his narrator work at "the paper-baling press" (178), where he and other workers prepare old newspapers for "the boiling vats" (179). Only when the narrator ceases his work momentarily is he able to "pore over muddy scraps of newspaper" (179) and to learn of elements of the cultural apparatus, such as "famous columnists" and "Broadway theater" (179), otherwise foreign to him. Immediately, there is a hostility toward those who control printed material as well as to print itself, for these alert the narrator and his co-workers to the middle-class culture from which they are excluded. The narrator says, "Shovelling newspapers all day, jumping on them, kicking them was not an unpleasant job for one who hated capitalism" (179), he "curse[s] at the newspapers" (179), and one of his fellow workers mentions his desire to murder "the editors of garbage" (179). This co-worker, a Native American named James Cherry, received only a vocational education, and his thwarted desire for an intellectual education results in paranoia and homicidal fury:

James Cherry had graduated as a carpenter, with a hatred of the white government that denied him a real education. After years of brooding his hate turned into a mania. He became firmly convinced that he was a great inventor, who was on the way to inventing a death-ray machine that would kill all the white tyrants. (179-80)

After recounting the demise of other workers at the dump who, "though enabled to read and write . . . are shot into factories, mills and mines, to be hopeless

wage-slaves for life" (180), the narrator spins his own tale of his pursuit of two women, one "a Portuguese girl who worked on the garbage dump, and the other was a New England aristocrat who lived on Beacon Hill" (181). Although the narrator presents the two women as representing "two opposing kinds of love, the physical and the spiritual" (181), they also represent the gap between the moneyed leisure classes, who have full access to indulgence in the arts due to the capital gained by the labor of others, and those who must trade their labor, or, in the case of Concha, the Portuguese girl, her body, for wages. After Concha prostitutes herself to the narrator, he walks by the house of a girl "playing Mozart from the window" (184). Although bewitched by her "world of spiritual beauty, of music, and art, and ethereal love" (184), he realizes that "he could never enter it" (184). If it were not already clear to the narrator that America's economic system will prevent his engagement with high culture, Gold includes the threat of a forcible separation of the cultured and laboring classes. Moments after the narrator's depression-producing epiphany, a policeman jabs him with a club and tells him that "bums have got no business hanging around this part of town" (184). What follows is a reaction against culture itself, very similar to the narrator's rejection of literature in *Jews Without Money*:

"Mozart and candlelight and the spiritual values, to hell with you all!"

I thought. "You are parasites. Concha is the one who pays for you!

It's more honorable to work on a garbage dump than to be a soulful parasite on Beacon Hill. . . ." (185)

An even earlier story by Gold entitled "The Password to Thought--to

Culture," published in the *Liberator* in 1922, recounts, in the words of John Pyros, "a day in the life of a poor searching youth drawn to the arts but forced by economic necessities to sweatshop labor" (22). In this story, David Brandt, a shipping clerk, desires to improve his mind both during the day, while he is at work, and in the evening, at home, where he lives with his mother and his disabled father. In both places he faces opposition against his self-education. At work, his boss, Mr. Neuheim, catches him reading Ruskin's *Sesame and Lilies*. What follows is a diatribe against workers pursuing intellectual endeavors, against anything that does not further the production of goods and capital:

"I didn't know what it was before, but I see how it's this Thought"--
 [Mr. Neuheim] sneered again--"and this Culture. Cut it out, see? If
 ye want to read, do it outside the factory, and read something that'll
 bring you in dividends--good American reading." (103)

In place of "thought" and "culture," Neuheim advocates "common sense" (103), by which he means the pursuit of nothing but increasing one's economic standing. After giving David a rags-to-riches speech recounting how he and Mr. Shinster, the other co-owner of the sweatshop, rose from poverty, Neuheim twists Shakespeare to make his point:

Well, ye know in his Choolyus Caesar, this man Caesar says: Let me
 have men that are fat, and that don't think; that is, don't think outside
 of business, ye understand. Well, that's my advice to you my boy,
 especially if ye want to hold your job and got any ambition. (103)

What distinguishes "The Password to Thought--to Culture" from "Love on a Garbage Dump" is that Gold reveals how a division of labor, both economic and literary or cultural, is maintained through a willful negation on the part of workers of their intellectual capacities. Neuheim claims to have succeeded in business through such a negation. Although David's invalid father is briefly seen reading *Vorwaerts*, Abraham Cahan's Yiddish-language socialist daily, David's mother is as frustrated and angered by David's reading as is Neuheim. Whereas Neuheim's concern is that a pursuit of culture and labor are incompatible, and thus every moment David steals to improve his mind he is simultaneously robbing dollars from the pockets of Neuheim and Shinsler, David's mother is convinced that literature will lead him to an interrogation of existence which can only result in unhappiness. When David reveals a suicidal depression to her, brought upon by the drudgery and emptiness of his exhaustive and unstimulating work, his mother's response is to fault the books he reads: "I don't know what's the matter with those books, anyway; they make you sick, David" (109). His mother detests his reading so much that she claims she would prefer him to return to his pre-literary debauchery:

What a funny, changeable boy you are! Two or three years ago we could never keep you at home nights, you were so wild. You did nothing but go about till early morning with your friends--and fine friends they were too, poolroom loafers, gamblers, pimps, all the East Side filth. Now you read those books that settlement lady gave you; and I don't know which is worse. Go out; put on your hat and coat

and go! (109-10)

Gold continues his depiction of a class-based division of literary opportunity in *Jews Without Money*. Almost every character within the novel who demonstrates an interest in the written word becomes separated from it, often in a very shocking fashion.¹⁶ Five characters in particular encounter shocking separations from their adored texts--Joey Cohen, Reb Samuel Ashkenazi, the narrator's father Herman, the narrator himself, and his sister Esther. While Levy may be right that "individual accidents" (161) are responsible for many of these separations, and no single case forwards a theory of cultural exclusion as thoroughly as does either "Love on a Garbage Dump" or "The Password to Thought--to Culture," their combined emphasis suggests that an extended immersion in literature is not an option for denizens of the East Side tenements. Furthermore, if we construe *Jews Without Money* as a bildungsroman of sorts, the narrator's observation of the fate of his literary family members and neighbors could lead him to that same conclusion, whether or not that conclusion is a rational one.¹⁷

¹⁶ Gold does include exceptions to this rule. One of the narrator's childhood friends "writes wealthy musical comedies" (38) in adulthood, and another becomes "a proud movie director" (38). However, the narrator never explains how these characters succeeded, as if that knowledge is kept secret not only from him but also from the neighborhood as a whole.

¹⁷ Another possibility is that Gold decided not to alter events he witnessed as a child thoroughly enough to make the same points regarding workers' exclusion from culture as he had in his earlier fiction. While the anecdotal nature of *Jews Without Money* provides less ground from which to extrapolate a theory of cultural exclusion, it also prevents the novel from becoming as dogmatic as a more consistent and developed approach would demand. The focus of the novel is also different from some of Gold's earlier fiction and drama. In *Jews Without Money*, Gold restricts

The first character in the novel to suffer a wrenching separation from literature is Joey Cohen, a member of the narrator's "Gang of Little Yids" who is killed when he attempts to hitch a ride from a horse car "and in jumping, fell under the wheels" (*Jews* 49). Joey Cohen's existence in the novel is brief, brief enough that one critic has called the character "totally irrelevant to whatever little there is of a plot or narrative in this novel" (Klein 187). Klein continues by suggesting that "[t]here has been nothing in the novel to motivate such grief" (187) felt by the narrator, who exclaims upon reflecting on Joey's death:

Joey Cohen! you who were sacrificed under the wheels of a horse car,
I see you again, Joey! I see your pale face, so sensitive despite its
childish grime and bruises. You who are precocious in the Jewish
way, full of a strange kindness and understanding. There are dark
rings under your eyes, as under mine. (32)

Klein concludes that "the observation that Joey had been 'sacrificed' is patently absurd--there is an important lesson here for little boys, but not so grandiose a one" (187-88) and that the effect of Joey's death is "the most purely bathetic" (187) in the novel. More recently, James Bloom has argued that the inclusion and death of Joey serve as a melodramatic touch. According to Bloom, "the story of the slum child run over by a wagon" (26) recalls Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities* and prepares readers

himself to the experiences of the characters without reference to larger social and economic forces. All events are directly experienced by the narrator or are told to him by other characters. If this results in an emphasis upon accidents and individual failings, then this is consistent with Gold's presentation of his neighborhood's largely pre-revolutionary consciousness.

for the similar fate of the narrator's sister, Esther.

What these critics fail to acknowledge is that Joey does serve a larger thematic purpose. While Klein argues that Joey's death is one event in a "catalog of some awful circumstantialities" (186) which contributes to "Gold's reiterated theme throughout . . . [of] the corruption of innocence" (186), he does not distinguish between Joey and the other tenement children. In fact, Joey is an exception among the tenement children. Although he is a member of the "Gang of Little Yids," he does not demonstrate the violence of the other members of the Chrystie Street gang, and the only crime he commits is shoplifting. Unlike the prostitutes and violent children, Joey is not corrupted--he is killed--though he is certainly victimized prior to his death, such as when he is molested by a pederast. In stark contrast to Nigger, whose introduction is accomplished through the tale of how he slugged a teacher for calling the narrator "LITTLE KIKE" (37; original capitalization) and who is labeled "a virile boy, the best pitcher, fighter and crapshooter in my gang" (37) and "our stern General in war" (37), Joey is first shown mourning the death of a butterfly. Whereas Nigger is praised for his willingness to "fight boys twice his age, . . . [to] fight men and cops" (43), Joey is eulogized as "a dreamy boy with spectacles" (43). Most importantly, though, it is Joey's intellectual promise which is memorialized:

Joey was the dreamy boy in spectacles who was so sorry when he killed the butterfly. He was always reading books, and had many queer ideas. It was he who put the notion in my head of becoming a doctor. I had always imagined I wanted to be a fireman. (49)

In the narrator's world of East Side tenements, the penalty for reading books, for encouraging others to improve their intellect and social station and to heal rather than to react to situations with violence is, apparently, death. Naficy has argued that Nigger is the implementer of a "ruthless and single-minded" (33) justice necessitated by the lack of a formal or institutional justice within the East Side community. In addition to punching the racist teacher, Nigger attempts to drop a brick upon a policeman who steals children's money and kills the pigeons of the gangster Louis One Eye, who acts as pimp for Nigger's sister Lily. When Lily dies of "the black syphilis" (268), Nigger is not avenged until he kills Louis seven years later. James Giles appropriately notes that Nigger's form of justice ultimately condones the very crimes it seeks to punish, for he does not murder Louis until he "has grown up and become a gangster himself" (63), and that the earlier street battles fought between the "Gang of Little Yids" and children of adjacent neighborhoods "foreshadow the class warfare that necessarily supports laissez-faire capitalism" (61). In contrast, according to Giles, Joey, along with the narrator's family, "stands in opposition to the destructive influence of Nigger" (63), which influence cannot be overestimated, for the narrator mentions that the infamous gangster Gyp the Blood "was just the ordinary rugged East Side boy. Any of us might have ended in the electric chair with him" (*Jews* 125).

Although Giles claims that "Joey's martyrdom" helps to prevent the narrator from being "corrupted or crushed" (65), it should be noted that the narrator continues to associate with Nigger long after Joey's death, to the extent of participating in the

slaughter of Louis's pigeons as one of the "Young Avengers of Chrystie Street," organized and led by Nigger. Although Joey was, then, an early intellectual stimulus upon the narrator, his death could have actually caused Mikey to swing more in the direction of Nigger, whether this was through an assumption that the gentle and bookish cannot survive or through a simple cessation of Joey's influence.

It is not only a physical death that awaits those of the East Side tenements who would immerse themselves in books, however. Three other characters who love literature--Reb Samuel, the narrator's father, and the narrator himself--suffer a spiritual death as a result of their love of literature. A specifically religious death is suffered by Reb Samuel, the devout Chassid, who slumps into despondency when he witnesses a disregard for kosher law among his neighbors and when Rabbi Schmarya, whose journey to America Samuel helps to fund and whom he believes will stem the apostasy of East Side Jewry, forsakes the East Side for "a better-paying job by a wealthy and un-Chassidic congregation in the Bronx" (203). Since the basis for the rejection of kosher law as well as the flight of Rabbi Schmarya is economic, in the case of Reb Samuel Gold unites the fate of characters devoted to the written word with their economic class in a manner not apparent in the portions of *Jews Without Money* which treat Joey Cohen.

Many commentators who evaluate Reb Samuel's importance in *Jews Without Money* do so by suggesting that Gold includes the figure of the religious Jew to show that Messianic faith is no answer to the economic oppression suffered by East Side

Jews.¹⁸ Certainly, a contrast is set up between Reb Samuel and Mendel Bum, who "freely ate pork and ham, and did other things forbidden to Jews" (78) because he believed poverty negated the imperative of observing kosher law:

One winter he capped all these blasphemies by the supreme sin. He went the rounds of the Bowery missions, and permitted each in turn to baptize him. For this he received money, sacks of potatoes, suits of clothes, various odd jobs, and a chance to learn the cornet. (78)

Furthermore, while various critics have pointed to the narrator's desire for "a Messiah who would look like Buffalo Bill, and who could annihilate our enemies" (190), this desire is not based on actual need but occurs as a result of assimilation into non-Jewish American culture and Nigger's continued influence upon the narrator. To suggest that Gold includes Reb Samuel merely as a foil to point out the powerlessness of religion to alter material conditions, however, is to oversimplify *Jews Without Money*. Virtually every character, with the exception of the pederast who molests Joey, is treated with great sympathy and pity, even those who initially appear as villains, such as Louis One Eye and Fyfka the Miser. Rather, I would suggest that Reb Samuel appears in *Jews Without Money* to indicate not that religion in itself is untenable but that American capitalism destroys all ideologies not entirely compatible with capitalism. If Old World Judaism will not acknowledge the primacy of the American economic system, then it must be defeated, as must its

¹⁸ See, for instance, Bloom 22; Folsom, "The Education of Michael Gold" 241; Giles 55-57; and Tuerk, "*Jews Without Money* as a Work of Art" 75-77.

representatives. In fact, the chapter which treats Reb Samuel's humiliation and degradation begins as follows:

Reb Samuel hummed Chassidic hymns as he worked at his machine in the umbrella store. He was trying to forget America. But who can do that? It roared in the street outside, it fought against him from the lips of his own children. It even reached into his synagogue, and struck at his God.

It finally defeated him, this America; it broke the old man, because he could not bend. (191)

As a living embodiment of holy texts which "interpolated his ordinary talk" (192) and who "soothed [his children] with quotations from the great Rabbis" (192), Reb Samuel is ripe for such a defeat. His undoing is his allegiance to those texts. Although, contrary to the narrator's allegation, Reb Samuel did bend when "he learned to shrug his shoulders and be silent" (196) and when "he saw Jews working on the Sabbath, Jews eating pork, and practicing other abominations" (196), he draws the line at the removal of beards. In order to further their employment opportunities and yet hold onto a fragment of their religious faith, members of his congregation use a depilatory to remove their facial hair without technically violating the Mosaic prohibition against trimming or cutting the corners of one's beard. Reb Samuel, along with "other ultra-orthodox factionalists" (197), raises money over a period of five years to bring a European rabbi to the U.S. to settle the dispute, "a real Rabbi, not one of those American compromisers" (197). Unfortunately for Samuel, the

rabbi rules in favor of the depilatory faction because they are the more affluent members of the congregation, and then he leaves the East Side altogether for a wealthier congregation. The message is clear: in the United States the almighty dollar has replaced the Almighty and is the answer to all questions. However, the narrator does not allow Reb Samuel to escape only with the death of his God. After the departure of Rabbi Schmarya, Reb Samuel's congregation becomes a Babel, "where the factions now quarreled endlessly" (203), and he loses language itself when he is afflicted by a stroke:

Before his wife could reach him, he collapsed to the floor. He tried to talk to her, but his tongue strangled. Queer, terrible, animal sounds came forth. He wept and wept as he made the vain effort to communicate with her. He could not get up from the floor. He could not move his arms and legs. Dr. Axelrod, after examining him, announced that Reb Samuel was paralyzed and needed a long rest.

(204)

For the remainder of his life, "he could not speak above a painful whisper" (204), and as his loss of language earlier signified a devolution, so do the continued effects of his stroke--"His little wife arose now an hour earlier each morning to sponge him, to spoon-feed him like a child, to fix his bedpan and other needs" (204).

Although less dramatic, the most extensive spiritual death encountered by a lover of literature is suffered by the narrator's father. Of all the characters in *Jews Without Money*, Herman, the narrator's father, is the most literary, for he is a

storyteller, and, at one point, for three consecutive chapters, Herman becomes the narrator of *Jews Without Money*. Although Herman is the community storyteller and his tales are adored by his children and neighbors, the narrator refers to Herman's gifts as untapped potentialities. Before the first of his father's stories begin, the narrator drills home the point that what separates the literary bourgeois class from the non-literary working class is access to education, when he comments that "had [his father] received an education, he might have become a fine writer" (81-82). Parallel to Herman's "memory for fiction" (87) is his memory for drama, for "he could repeat entire scenes of the plays he had seen, and act them out" (87). The narrator's summation of these talents as well as of Herman's supple voice when telling stories is that he "had the makings of an actor" (83). Despite not having pursued an acting career, Herman and his friends do have access to dramatic performances, possess "a strong, reverent passion for the theater" (87), and attend "favorite play[s], ten and twenty times" (87). However, the narrator characterizes their intellectual debates regarding art after these performances as further unrealized potential. "Each felt himself a subtle dramatic critic" (87) the narrator recounts, and the operative word is "felt" because what determines for posterity whether or not one is a critic is not one's innate skills, for these "uneducated manual workers" (87) quite possibly could have been subtle dramatic critics, but having one's name in print.

Herman cannot reconcile his love of literature with commerce, however, and this is his downfall. During his emigration by ship to America, he "evolved the curious idea that Schiller's play, 'The Robbers,' was unknown in America, and that

he would introduce it here" (88). He transcribes the play into Yiddish during an eleven-day storm, but, when he speaks to a Yiddish actor in America, he discovers the play is well-known in America. Herman laments, "Always I have been too late" (88). From this point, he spirals into paranoia, believing his future has been stolen from him, beginning with the Yiddish actor, Mogelescu, whom he believes "had cheated him of his rights" (88).

Granted, Herman is guilty of naivete, and American capitalism is not directly to blame for the dashing of his dramatic hopes. However, in his own mind, this incident and the vacuity of the American Dream are forever linked. Herman had been encouraged to come to America by his cousin Sam Kravitz, who claimed that he "in two short years, already owned his own factory for making suspenders" (100). What Herman discovers is that this factory is comprised of four workers, including Kravitz. The "factory" prospers when Herman solicits business from suspender shops "owned by Roumanians who had known [his] father" (108), but upon his return from his honeymoon, he discovers Kravitz has moved the shop and has "a paper from a lawyer proving that the shop was his" (109). In business, just as in the cultural world of theater, his "work had been for nothing" (109), with the result that he must admit to his children, "so now I work as a house painter. I work for another man, I am not my own master now. I am a man in a trap" (109). At least for Herman, cultural and business monopolies are related in that they benefit not those with the greatest aptitude or industry but those who begin with capital, are first, and/or are most ruthless.

Although the narrator credits Joey Cohen for his interest in books, it should be acknowledged that Herman pushes him toward literature and learning more thoroughly than any other single character does. For instance, in addition to claiming that his son will become a doctor, Herman compels his son to perform, to display his scholarship in Moscovitz's wine cellar:

My father made me stand on a table, to recite the poem I had learned
in school:

I love the name of Washington,

I love my country, too,

I love the flag, the dear old flag,

The red, white and blue. (120; original emphasis)

What is fascinating about this moment is that Herman is displaying not his son's patriotism or the patriotism explicit in the poem but his son's knowledge of English, for he admits, "already he speaks English, and I am in the country ten years and can't speak a word!" (120). Everyone then chimes in "this is a scholar!" (120), the irony being that their assumption that all male children can and should be scholars is negated by the very capitalist society the poem praises and whose ideology remains as foreign to them as the language the narrator speaks. This non-assimilation by Herman's generation is expressed through their valuation of study rather than business when someone within the wine cellar pronounces, "a millionaire he could become, but it is better he should be a doctor and a scholar" (121). At the evening's conclusion, the father once again steers his son toward a literary life by making his

son promise "you must become a learned one!" (123).

The narrator does not fulfill this promise, despite being "a precocious pupil" (303) and having "graduated [from public school] a year sooner than most boys" (303). Although encouraged by his English teacher, who tells him that "I have never seen better English compositions than yours, Michael" (304), and his parents to attend high school, he decides to enter the workforce at the age of twelve, largely because he cannot fathom how his parents can raise the "thousands of dollars needed for books, tuition, and the rest" (303) necessary if he is to fulfill their dream of becoming a doctor. Already, the narrator has come to the conclusion "that education is a luxury reserved for the well-to-do" (303), which fact other characters are unwilling to admit. Until hearing the revolutionary orator whose exhortation concludes *Jews Without Money*, this abandonment of scholarship leads Michael to a "despair, melancholy and helpless rage" (309) which no diversion available to workers can relieve.¹⁹

Although the narrator asserts economic necessity as the cause of his interrupted education and his vehemence against literature when Miss Barry, the English teacher, presents him with a collection of Emerson essays as a graduation

¹⁹ The narrator summarizes these diversions in a single paragraph:

At times I seriously thought of cutting my throat. At other times I dreamed of running away to the far west. Sex began to torture me. I developed a crazy religious streak. I prayed on the tenement roof in moonlight to the Jewish Messiah who would redeem the world. I took up with Nigger again. I spent my nights in a tough poolroom. I needed desperate stimulants; I was ready for anything. At the age of fifteen I began drinking and whoring with Nigger's crowd. (309)

gift, a significant textual revision brought to light by Richard Tuerk suggests that Gold may be foregrounding some residual guilt the narrator feels over the death of his sister Esther. Among the "outstanding set of changes" ("*Jews Without Money*" 70) Tuerk notes between "Poverty is a Trap," a 1927 *New Masses* sketch which later became the final three chapters of *Jews Without Money*, and the finished novel is that Gold originally had Michael searching everywhere for Esther when she disappears and is then killed by a truck. In *Jews Without Money*, he "does not bother to search for Esther; he reads while his mother gets ready to search" (Tuerk 71). Tuerk does not attempt to explain why Gold may have made this revision, but the revision does emphasize the opposition between literary pursuits and tenement survival which has operated throughout the novel; it also stands as the final notation of a secondary division of literary labor which *Jews Without Money* reveals. Whereas during the disappearance of his sister Michael chooses literature over his family, he later chooses to support his family rather than to continue his education. More importantly, Esther resembles Joey Cohen not only in her tragic death but in her demeanor and bookishness. Michael uses the word "dreamy" (274) to describe Esther, as he had in the case of Joey. While Joey is gentle, Esther is not only gentle but the epitome of cooperation and forgiveness. Michael recalls, "she wished to help everybody; she was precociously kind" (274), and when once he verbally abused her until she performed his chores in addition to her own, "she only shrugged her shoulders at my stubbornness, and went out quietly to hunt for the stovewood" (275). The narrator even admits that Esther is a better child to Herman than he is, for

whenever "she read a book she would repeat it in detail to my father, who loved any kind of story" (274).

Although Esther is shown to have the same love of literature possessed by her father, her brother, and Joey Cohen, and her father encourages her development of storytelling skills, she is significantly distinguished from these other characters. She is the only female character in *Jews Without Money* shown engaging in literary pastimes. Apparently, Esther is the one exception to Herman's rule that literature is not appropriate for women. When Miriam, the woman to whom he was originally engaged, implores "Let us discuss plays and poetry, Herman," he responds, "I do not discuss such things with women" (97). Likewise, he attends and discusses plays only with his male friends, many of which discussions take place in Moscovitz's wine cellar, an almost exclusively male enclave.

Michael does not make the exception that his father does. While much of his abuse of his sister could be construed as simple sibling rivalry, it is important that the majority of this abuse involves interfering with Esther's enjoyment of literature. In addition to forcing his chores upon her so that he will have the opportunity to read and she will not, he takes great delight in countering her love of fairy tales with the grotesque "things I knew about our East Side street, [until] she would cry, and say I was lying to her" (274). And the only event for which he apostrophizes an apology to the deceased Esther is his theft of her treasured "Blue Fairy Tale Book" (275).

Correspondent to Michael's attempts to deny his sister the literature she so dearly loves is the division of labor between Reb Samuel and his wife, Mrs.

Ashkenazi. When she takes over his umbrella store so that her husband might study the Talmud full time, "he was glad of this arrangement. It left his mind free for religion" (194). The narrator clarifies that this "arrangement" is thoroughly one-sided and that it quickly drains Mrs. Ashkenazi of her health and of all possible leisure time:

But it was hard on little Mrs. Ashkenazi, his wife. She was a tiny, gray woman, weighing not more than ninety pounds, and sapped dry as a herring by work. Her eyelids were inflamed with loss of sleep. She slaved from dawn till midnight, cooking and cleaning at home, then working in the umbrella store. At forty she was wrinkled like a woman of seventy. (194)

Nor is Mrs. Ashkenazi's lot particularly unusual within *Jews Without Money*. Whether or not men use the time afforded by the labor of women for literary pursuits, within the tenement women are depicted as working more frequently than men are, and some men live exclusively off the labor of women, such as the numerous pimps, one of whom, Harry, does have an interest in literature, for it is he who gave Esther the beloved Blue Fairy Tale Book. One hesitates to credit Gold with forwarding a feminist proletarianism, for in his manifestoes and critical essays he stresses the masculinity of proletarianism and the effeminacy of bourgeois literature,²⁰ and, despite pronouncing his mother "the heroine of 'Jews Without

²⁰ For a critique of the "sexual essentialism" of Gold and other male advocates of proletarianism, see Barbara Foley, *Radical Representations* 96-97 and 213-246 *passim*. Foley analyzes Gold's tendency to equate proletarianism with masculine

Money'" ("Author's Note" 11), he decided to make the revolutionary speaker who concludes *Jews Without Money* a man whereas the Union Square orator whom he heard in 1914 was the Wobbly Elizabeth Gurley Flynn. However, through his inclusion of the gentle Esther, he does complicate his presentation of a class-based division of literary labor in his novel by demonstrating how the tenement itself imitates the broader society's culture of exclusion, making its women disappear in perpetual labor even as the men search for the word. Considering his own experiences and his extensive depiction of workers' exclusion from the arts in "Love on a Garbage Dump," "The Password to Thought--to Culture," and *Jews Without Money*, it is highly unlikely that Gold would have reacted favorably to Floyd Dell's suggestion that Gold "look a striking miner in the eye and say, 'The leisure you have given me hasn't been misspent. In fact, if you'd pay more attention to [*The Liberator*], and boom its circulation so that I could have a decent salary, it would be

bodies and sexuality, but Gold's theoretical exclusion of women from the production of working-class literature was frequently far less subtle. In "Go Left, Young Writers!" it apparently never occurs to Gold that some of these young writers might be women:

A new writer has been appearing; a wild youth of about twenty-two, the son of working-class parents, who himself works in the lumber camps, coal mines, and steel mills, harvest fields and mountain camps of America. He is sensitive and impatient. He writes in jets of exasperated feeling and has no 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. (188)

However, some reviewers of *Jews Without Money* mandated a consistently masculinist prose which not even Gold could achieve. J.Q. Neets considered "Gold's lyrical invocations to his mother or the Revolution or what not. . . . incongruous; their gushiness does not fit in with the generally vigorous, aggressively masculine style of the book" (15).

money well spent'" ("Explanations and Apologies" 25).

Influences

From the preceding analysis, it would seem that *Jews Without Money* adheres quite well to the foundations of a proletarian literature established by Gold in his manifesto "Towards Proletarian Art" and in his other critical essays of the 1920s which theorized traits of proletarianism, for the narrator restricts himself to recounting his experiences and those of other members of the tenement community, thus foregrounding the primacy of experience and environment over literary tradition or convention. Indeed, the gap between characters' literary aspirations and the material resources necessary for fulfilling those aspirations might suggest that Gold intends readers to construe that non-proletarian literature exacerbates the psychological effects of economic inequality, as it generates desires for which workers and the impoverished do not have the means of satisfying. However, Gold's "effort to wrest literary production from its academic monopoly and the hierarchies that this monopoly supports" (Bloom 67) included an attempt to reclaim the literary past for proletarians. Similar to Parrington, Calverton, Hicks, and Smith, Gold developed a usable literary past throughout his career, though Gold forwarded a broader canon, both geographically and historically, than those literary historians. That is, while those historians revealed a strong bias in favor of realism and naturalism, Gold's proletarianism embraced the avant-garde and new technologies.

Throughout his criticism, Gold developed lists of writers from previous

centuries who exhibit some sort of revolutionary spirit or whose works remain of value to current revolutionaries. Several nineteenth-century American authors with whom leftist literary historians of the 1920s and 1930s were enthralled--Emerson, Thoreau, Twain, and Whitman--are also singled out by Gold as worthy of praise and imitation; in his September 17, 1935 "Change the World!" column for the *Daily Worker*, he credits them for being "the spiritual forefathers of the proletarian writers of America" (5). Of these figures, Walt Whitman and Mark Twain exerted the greatest influence upon Gold. In addition to beginning the final section of "Towards Proletarian Art" with an extended depiction of Whitman as a proto-proletarian poet whose legacy is equally valuable to the formation of an American collectivist and worker-centered literature as is the model of the Soviet Proletkults, Gold later conferred the title "America's first proletarian poet" ("Freemont Older" 20) upon Whitman and even suggested that Whitman contributed to the development of Marxism in the United States.²¹

²¹ See Gold's "The Second American Renaissance" in Folsom, *Mike Gold: A Literary Anthology* 243-54. In this essay, originally a paper delivered at the Fourth Congress of American Writers in 1941, Gold suggests that the movement leftward by numerous American writers during the 1930s was neither solely a result of the Great Depression nor of Soviet influence but was the continuation of a native American radicalism:

And the fact that there was present a living core of Marxist thought in America, ready to shape the thought of the intellectuals, is due to the presence of a mature and firm Communist movement--itself no Moscow plot, but the legitimate child of American parents and grandparents such as Horace Greeley, Albert Brisbane, Eugene V. Debs, Bill Haywood, Jack London and Walt Whitman. (249)

For a thorough analysis and critique of Gold's varied attempts to portray Whitman as a proletarian and socialist, see Richard Tuerk, "Michael Gold on Walt Whitman," *Walt Whitman Review* 3.4 (1986): 16-23.

While direct influences may be difficult to trace, two interlocked facets of Whitman's verse operate within *Jews Without Money*, one stylistic and the other ideological. At points, Gold replicates Whitman's famed technique of the extended catalogue, such as in the first chapter, where the narrator devotes several consecutive paragraphs to the assortment of people and animals to be found on any given day on the street outside his tenement, from "pushcart peddlers" and "livery stable coach drivers," to "mothers . . . push[ing] their baby carriages," to copulating dogs and swearing parrots, to "pimps, gamblers and red-nosed bums; peanut politicians, pugilists in sweaters; tinhorn sports and tall longshoremen in overalls," to the "saloon goat [who] lay on the sidewalk, and dreamily consumed a *Police Gazette*" (13-14). In true Whitmanesque fashion, the narrator largely eschews editorial comment during the catalogue and concludes with an ecstatic celebration of everything in his purview: "Excitement, dirt, fighting, chaos!" (14). While ostensibly this opening catalogue serves to plunge the reader amid the "chaos" of the Lower East Side, the prolonged juxtaposition of discordant images imposes an equality upon normally stratified social stations and actions. The narrator's leveling of valuation is nowhere more apparent than in the final paragraph of this catalogue, wherein laughing prostitutes and "a prophet . . . , an old-clothes Jew with a white beard" (14) inhabit successive sentences as if they were congruous rather than mutually opposed entities.

The prostitute-prophet combination in *Jews Without Money* bears a striking resemblance to a particular catalogue from Whitman's "Song of Myself," wherein a prostitute and the President are adjoined (15.46-49) to similar effect. Later in "Song

of Myself," Whitman declares himself the medium for the "many long dumb voices" and "forbidden voices" (24.11, 20) of the oppressed and disdained, and it could be said that Gold's narrator acts similarly as a medium for the formerly voiceless throughout *Jews Without Money*, including impoverished East Side Jews as a whole, children who died early and violent deaths, the infirm, the insane, prostitutes, gangsters, and, most intimately, his own father, whose literary aspirations only live on through his son's repetition of bedtime stories.

Curiously enough, in Gold's sequel to *Jews Without Money*, "A Jewish Childhood in the New York Slums,"²² this last process is reversed, as the narrator reads *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* to his invalid father. In this section, entitled "Twain in the Slums," Mark Twain is portrayed as a Messianic "magnificent figure all in white" who attends an East Side performance of *The Prince and the Pauper*, patting the heads of children as if he were blessing them, and who "showed deep concern for the Jews, would issue frequent protests against their slaughter by the ugly Russian tsardom" (307). Twain is even credited with a "miracle" (308) when the narrator restores his father's will to live after a suicide attempt by reading *Huckleberry Finn* to him. Considering Gold's virtual deification of Twain, it should come as no surprise that several commentators have noted similarities between *Jews*

²² "A Jewish Childhood in the New York Slums" originally appeared as a series of articles, running from April 11 to October 17, 1959, within Gold's regular column for the San Francisco *People's World*. Although I adopt Michael Folsom's term "sequel" (*Mike Gold* 292) for this collection of reminiscences, "A Jewish Childhood" does not continue the narrative of *Jews Without Money* but adds vignettes anachronistically.

Without Money and *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Diane Levenberg considers Gold's work to be "the tale of a poor, Jewish urban Huckleberry Finn" (237) and suggests that Gold's employment of an "episodic plot to narrate the story of the development of an American street hero" (237) is in the tradition of Twain. Richard Tuerk further extrapolates that "like Twain's masterpiece, *Jews Without Money* combines elements of the episodic with elements of the cumulative plot as it treats its protagonist's unhappy initiation" ("*Jews Without Money*" 74).²³ Tuerk may strike closer to the similarity between the two works, however, when he notes that *Jews Without Money* "may be taken as the story of the education of a radical" (74). If Huck Finn must unlearn everything he has been taught regarding African Americans and slavery through his love for Jim, then the narrator of Gold's book must unlearn the capitalist indoctrination to which he has been subject through compassion for the members of his community. Aside from the occasional organizing activities of his mother--who initiates a failed rent strike--and the relatively minor characters of Aunt Lena and Dr. Solow, the narrator is presented with no alternative to capitalism until the final page of the book. Throughout his childhood he is inundated with rags-to-riches stories, especially by his father, and he is surrounded by entrepreneurship in its seamiest forms, those of gangsterism and prostitution. Contrary to those critics who would claim that the narrator's "conversion" to the "workers' Revolution" (309)

²³ James R. Giles concurs with Tuerk's reading. See Giles's *The Naturalistic Inner-City Novel* 50-51. However, Tuerk suggests that *Jews Without Money* actually bears closer resemblances to Twain's *Roughing It* and "Old Times on the Mississippi." See his "*Jews Without Money* as a Work of Art" 68.

at the end of the text is abrupt,²⁴ I would argue that the narrator works toward this conversion through his realization that capitalism has led his neighbors, friends, and family members to degradation, violence, insanity, as in the case of Zunzer the landlord, and self-hatred, as in the case of his father.

In at least one passage, however, Gold's book mimics *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* more than structurally. In a chapter entitled "Jews and Christians," the father of the narrator of *Jews Without Money* becomes enraged when he reads of a railroad accident in a Yiddish newspaper:

"What has happened, you ask?" my father repeated in the important tone of a pedant. "What has happened is that seventeen innocent people were killed in a railroad accident in New Jersey! And whose fault was it? The fault of the rich American railroads!"

My mother was horrified. She wiped her boiling face with her apron and muttered: "God help us and shield us! Were there any Jews among the dead?"

My father glanced rapidly through the list of names. "No," he said, "only Christians were killed."

My mother sighed with relief. She went back into her kitchen. She was no longer interested; Christians did not seem like people to her. (163-164)

²⁴ See, for instance, Rideout, *The Radical Novel* 152 and Bloom 135. In contrast, Barbara Foley contends that the revolutionary ideology of the final page operates throughout the whole text. See *Radical Representations* 298-99.

Compare the above passage to the following from *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, where Huck creates and tells a story about a boating accident to Aunt Sally:

"It warn't the grounding--that didn't keep us back but a little.

We blowed out a cylinder-head."

"Good gracious! anybody hurt?"

"No'm. Killed a nigger."

"Well, it's lucky; because sometimes people do get hurt. . . ."

(841)²⁵

The prejudice demonstrated by the narrator's mother operates throughout *Jews Without Money*, especially as it exists between oppressed groups and prohibits class solidarity. The narrator states, for instance, that his mother "was opposed to the Italians, Irish, Germans and every other variety of Christians with whom we were surrounded" (163), but, while her own encounters with anti-Semitism may have understandably led her to this position,²⁶ this history of persecution does not make her or other East Side Jews any more tolerant of other oppressed groups. When several gypsy families move to Chrystie Street, the narrator's mother, "like all the mothers along the street," tells him not to play with their children because "they are

²⁵ I would like to thank Dr. Mary E. Papke for pointing out the similarity of these two passages to me.

²⁶ Whereas the mother bases her hatred and fear of Christians upon her Hungarian childhood, Gold ensures that readers do not assume that violent anti-Semitism is a purely European phenomenon by including a scene in which the narrator wanders off his street and is attacked by eight Italian boys with sticks, "stones, bricks and vegetables" who chant "Christ-killer!" (188-89) during the assault.

filthy with lice" (177). When several Chinese men rent an apartment in the narrator's tenement, rumors circulate that they have turned it into an "opium den" or a "gambling house" (177), and there is even a suggestion that the men are involved in white slavery. When Joe, the African American co-worker of the narrator's mother, complains that "The whole world is against us black people," she responds with "The trouble with you here is you are lazy" (245). And the narrator claims it was "inevitable" that his childhood friend would acquire "the East Side nickname: Nigger" because of his black hair and the fact that dark skin and "his nose had been squashed at birth" (42), although these East Siders seem unaware that they are all "niggers" to Anglo-Americans, made clear by the fact that when the narrator's mother arrived in the United States, she slept "on the floor of a crowded cellar for immigrants . . . called the Nigger House" (159). The mother's racism is all the more perturbing given the narrator's description of "her black, gypsy face" (153). Gold does not allow his European Jewish characters to maintain an uncontested racial superiority, though, for one night the narrator's father invites an African Jew to dinner, and the evening concludes when "the Negro left haughtily, kissing the *mezzuzah* again. By his manner one could see he despised us all as backsliders, as mere pretenders to the proud title of Jew" (175).

While Twain and Whitman fit within a development of proletarian literature primarily restricted to American influences as presented by Calverton, Hicks, Parrington, and Smith, Gold adds to his revolutionary canon a great number of

English and continental figures, from Chaucer to Kropotkin.²⁷ The one writer of European antiquity who influenced Gold more than any other, however, was William Shakespeare. References to Shakespeare pepper Gold's work from the equating of Caliban to the elevated train in "The American Famine," to the factory owner's butchering of *Julius Caesar* in "The Password to Thought--to Culture," to Fyfka the Miser being called Caliban in *Jews Without Money*, to the pledge that "we will give you a proletarian Shakespeare, too; if that is so important" (204) in "Notes of the Month," to an extended meditation upon Yiddish performances of Shakespeare in "A Jewish Childhood in the New York Slums."

"A Jewish Childhood in the New York Slums" demonstrates especially well Gold's particular approach to Shakespeare as well as to the literature of antiquity overall: while he has a great veneration for Shakespeare, he also feels that Shakespeare has to be made accessible and relevant to particular audiences in particular times and circumstances. When speaking of the Yiddish actor Boris Thomasheffsky's rendition of Hamlet, Gold instantly figures Shakespeare as culturally contestable, for he asks, "What Anglo-Saxon star would dare play Hamlet with such a Falstaffian stomach?" (310). The suggestion is that no existent dramatic text need be chained to the cultural and historical conditions under which it was produced or to a theatrical tradition of presentation, but, rather, each individual dramatic production may, and perhaps should, be tailored to the concerns, cultural

²⁷ For representative lists of those writers whom Gold considered to some degree revolutionary, see his "America Needs a Critic" 132; "In Foggy California" 169; and "Wilder: Prophet of the Genteel Christ" 200.

knowledges, and tastes of its particular audience. Here Gold also reveals a greater sophistication regarding the interaction between literature, politics, and economics than has been accorded to him by critics such as Richard Hofstadter, who labelled him a "hatchetman" of the Communist Party (*Anti-Intellectualism* 293). Gold's calls for a proletarian literature do not necessarily amount to a rejection of previous "bourgeois" literature. Instead, these calls include an imperative for the appropriation of literature of the past. If the literature of antiquity is merely replicated and not reconfigured and updated, then the danger is that cultural, economic, and social groups who were excluded or condemned by those works originally will continue to be so as a condition of "great literature." In "A Jewish Childhood in the New York Slums," Gold demonstrates that American Yiddish theatre of the early twentieth century engaged in such a simultaneous admiration and appropriation of Shakespeare and other notable European playwrights through his mention of Jacob Gordin's *The Jewish King Lear*, wherein "a wealthy dry good merchant" is betrayed by his American children (311) and Gordin's transformation of "Goethe's *Faust* into the tale of a poor Talmud scholar whom the Devil tempts and turns into a rich, unhappy, alcoholic millionaire" (311). Most interesting is how, in his victimhood, Shylock is considered by Gold to be the hero of *The Merchant of Venice*. Although Gold attributes a certain degree of "gentile prejudice" (312) to Shakespeare, he praises the playwright for humanizing Shylock and being able to "register some of the deeps of the Jewish tragedy" (312), with, however, the proviso that a Jewish audience alone could comprehend the full effects of living within "the

world of Christian hate and racism" (312) and "could truly understand . . . Shylock, the full depth of his tragedy" (312).

That the thoroughness of Shakespeare's characterizations disrupts any simple furtherance of particular ideologies and enables different audiences to project their own plights upon the spectacles being enacted may explain partially why, according to Gold, American Yiddish audiences disdained the "tight 'well-made' problem play" (311) as well as indicate why Gold faulted Upton Sinclair for sanitizing and sentimentalizing workers and revolutionaries. Calling upon Shakespeare once again, as well as Fielding, Gold counters that "there are Hamlets, Othellos, Tom Joneses and Macbeths among" workers and that he "prefer[s] this variety of life" ("In Foggy California" 169). Furthermore, stressing the complexity of each individual is not only a necessary component of realist fiction, but it also prevents potentially revolutionary narratives from devolving into morality plays. As Gold puts it, "Away with lies about human nature. . . . Everyone is a mixture of motives; we do not have to lie about our hero in order to win our case" ("Notes of the Month" 5).

Whereas Gold accuses Sinclair of making it seem that "every worker is like Jesus" ("In Foggy California" 169), *Jews Without Money* is filled with Lower East Siders who exploit the labor of and commit violence toward one another. In addition to gangsters, pimps, and men, such as Reb Samuel, who rely upon the labor of the female members of their families so that they are afforded time to pursue their literary and religious aspirations, Gold includes the stories of two misers, one a freeloader and another a landlord. Fyfka the Miser is an immigrant who takes

advantage of the hospitality of the narrator's family by staying with them seven months without contributing any money to grocery bills or paying any rent. While the narrator dehumanizes Fyfk a by noting his lack of hygiene and manners, citing his physical deformities, comparing his appearance to that of a camel, baboon, and dog, and calling him a "maggot-yellow dark ape" (76), a "human garbage can" (76), and a "monster" (76), he also labels Fyfk a "fevered Rothschild" (76). Although the narrator may fall short of pity for Fyfk, he does provide a possible explanation for Fyfk's behavior, for the miser's exploitation of his hosts' hospitality, his neglect of hygiene, and his refusal to engage in any activity which will cost him money: "Thus out of eight dollars a week he managed to save some two hundred dollars in the months he sponged on us. He had heard of Rothschild. He wanted to go into business in America. Poverty makes some people go insane" (76). We might add that poverty will cause certain individuals to exploit other members of their impoverished communities and to deny themselves any pleasure save the acquisition of money, which they may have been trained by the larger society to believe is the only respectable and worthwhile pleasure. As James D. Bloom comments, Gold's excessive and seemingly discordant descriptions of the miser frustrate "the language whereby hierarchies produce invidious taxonomies and disguise them as natural and scientific" (62) and serve to insist "that Fyfk is a social product" (63) of an economic system which contradictorily excuses the eccentricities and thrift of self-made men yet demonizes the same behavior in those who do not achieve wealth. Furthermore, for Gold "to write a truthful book of Poverty" (*Jews Without Money*

71), it is necessary to resist characterizing the poor as saints who resist any exploitative behavior on their own part but who merely suffer at the hands of the bourgeoisie. Delving into the more insidious actions of the poor allows Gold to portray capitalism as an economic system which disrupts communities and turns their members against one another, whereas a more antiseptic rendering of poverty would portray interpersonal relationships within an economic class as impervious to capitalism's influence.

Likewise, Zunzer the landlord, the other significant miser in *Jews Without Money*, is humanized through the revelation, by Dr. Solow, of his experiences in America prior to the beginning of Gold's narrative. Upon arriving in America, Zunzer "starved and suffered for five years" (252) so that he could save money, which he hid under his mattress, to pay for the transport of his wife and children to the United States. According to Dr. Solow, Zunzer began to equate the money he saved with his loved ones and his reason for living itself: "The money was not money; it was his family, his peace, his happiness, his life and death" (253). Although robbed of his savings, Zunzer was able to bring his family to America after a few more years of saving. However, by this point, he had so thoroughly inculcated within himself a pattern of miserly behavior that he starved his wife and children and denied them medical attention with the result that the means he had adopted to reunite himself with his family ends in his wife's death and his children abandoning him. Zunzer eventually falls into dementia, hallucinating that he is being physically attacked and robbed. When Dr. Solow tells Zunzer that his obsession with money is

driving him to insanity, Zunzer replies, "How can one live without money? And if other men fight for money, must one not fight, too? The whole world is sick with this disease, Dr. Solow, I am not the only one" (254). And this is exactly Gold's point. A melodramatic rendering of the poor as being morally good, healthy, or sane and the wealthy evil is poor Marxism, for it replicates an essentialism which diverts attention from the material conditions and structures which frequently ensure the health and well-being of the wealthy at the expense of the same in the impoverished. If poverty were "cheerful and virtuous" as Gold claims Sinclair presents it, then what is wrong with being poor? Gold answers that the question itself is absurd: "Anyone who has been really poor during a lifetime becomes a little morbid, if he has any brains" ("In Foggy California" 169).

If an early exposure to Shakespeare assisted Gold in his refusal to reduce characters to types but to portray them realistically and in their full complexity, then a participation in avant-garde methods of presentation allowed him to move from particular cases to abstraction. While complex characterizations may prevent the furtherance of a priori assumptions, there is the danger that readers will not progress beyond pity for individuals. In *Jews Without Money*, the narrator notes, for instance, that his mother "could be sorry for any one" (253), including Zunzer, but her conclusion that the landlord "needs another wife" (253) indicates that she is only concerned with alleviating one person's misery at a time, not with eliminating the conditions which produce Zunzers in the first place. Although such pity might be temporarily gratifying to the Zunzers of the world, it is ultimately patronizing, for to

say "poor man" in sympathy only highlights the disparity between speaker and the object of pity, and fails to acknowledge that this object of pity is a synecdoche of an injustice which affects a multitude. The narrator's stated aim is to "write a truthful book of Poverty" (71), not a truthful book about a few poor persons he knew when he was a child. As poverty is an abstract economic concept, albeit with concrete material consequences for flesh-and-blood humans, created and maintained by supra-individual means of production, institutions, and ideologies, at least from a Marxist standpoint, so must a treatise which purports to reveal the causes and effects of as well as solutions to poverty also transcend individual narratives.

Bohemian New York, especially Greenwich Village, where he moved shortly after 1914 (Folsom, "Introduction" 12), was an excellent site for Gold to observe and learn avant-garde methods of politically motivated abstraction. Whether or not Gold attended the Paterson Silk Strike Pageant, which was performed in Madison Square Garden on June 7, 1913, or even heard or read anything about it at the time, he certainly would have become familiar with it through his association with John Reed, its director, in the following years.²⁸ The Paterson Pageant was a thoroughly modernist amalgam of existent genres, levels of discourse, and revolutionary staging. Ostensibly a realistic account enacted to inform New Yorkers of the major events of

²⁸ For fuller accounts of the Paterson Pageant, as well as of the strike it commemorates, see Steve Golin, *The Fragile Bridge: The Paterson Silk Strike* (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1988); Lee Papa, "Staging Communities in Early Twentieth-Century American Labor Drama," diss., U of Tennessee, 1995, 36-63; Anne Huber Tripp, *The IWW and the Paterson Silk Strike of 1913* (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1987); and Steven Watson, *Strange Bedfellows: The First American Avant-Garde* (New York: Abbeville, 1991) 138-149.

the strike up until the moment of its performance staged in part because newspapers conspired with factory owners by omitting any coverage, the performance blurred the lines between reality and its representation and between subject/perceiver and object/perceived usually demarcated by realism. The majority of the cast of over one thousand was comprised of Paterson strikers²⁹ who portrayed themselves in the pageant. "All the leaders of the strike spoke" (Papa 49), and during a re-enactment of the funeral of Valentino Modestino, who had been killed during the strike,³⁰ two of those leaders, Carlo Tresca and Bill Haywood, delivered exactly the same speeches as they had at the actual funeral. That Tresca's oration was given in Italian and the pageant included songs in German and Italian as well as English shows a documentary attention to verisimilitude beyond concern for an "average" audience member's ability to comprehend that verisimilitude.³¹ Whereas the episodes attempted to reflect the actual events of the strike as accurately as possible, the set design sought to break down barriers between performers and audience, most notably through a wide aisle, meant to represent a street, which bisected the audience and through which performers marched and Modestino's casket was carried. Such erasure of physical space between audience and performers soon became a staple of

²⁹ Watson reports that "hundreds of unionists from Brooklyn, Astoria, and the Bronx" (146) joined 1,147 Paterson strikers as cast members.

³⁰ Modestino was not a striking worker, but during a police assault upon the strikers, he "was killed by a stray gunshot while standing on the porch of his house with one of his children in his arms" (Papa 48).

³¹ Of course, the multilingual performance also appealed to those audience members who may have been more fluent in German or Italian than English.

radical theatre, as is exemplified in Soviet constructivism and Clifford Odets's *Waiting for Lefty*. Whether the set design or the political predisposition of those attending is to be credited, the audience joined the cast in booing the police and singing "La Marseillaise" and the "Internationale."

Despite the documentary design of the pageant as a whole, Reed added some contrasting touches which prevented the performance from being strictly representational. One of the most interesting of these was his pairing of "seditious I.W.W. lyrics" (Watson 146) with the tune of "Harvard, Old Harvard."³² Also, a few of the episode titles, as printed in the program--"The Mills Alive--The Workers Dead," "The Workers Begin to Think," "The Mills Dead--The Workers Alive"--function much the same as intertitles in silent films do, as abstract concepts which are followed by pantomimes that illustrate those concepts physically. Finally, that the production was entitled a "pageant" raises the questions of what and who should be celebrated in American life--patriotism and Anglo-American history, common subjects for pageants of the time, or struggles for equality by recent immigrants?

Although the Paterson Pageant had an immense effect upon George Cram Cook and Susan Glaspell, founders of the Provincetown Players, Gold's three one-act plays produced by the Players between 1917 and 1920--*Down the Airshaft*, *Ivan's Homecoming*, and *Money*--were primarily realistic dramas and show little evidence of

³² Reed had been a cheerleader at Harvard. Although the tone of the Paterson Pageant was serious, if not somber, throughout, Reed's joke at the expense of his alma mater was hardly out of character for the IWW, as its most famous songsmith, Joe Hill, frequently added his comic and revolutionary lyrics to popular tunes and hymns.

avant-garde influence, theatrical or otherwise.³³ However, Gold's next play, *Hoboken Blues*, was anything but realistic. Michael Folsom attributes the style of *Hoboken Blues* to Gold's 1925 visit to the Soviet Union, where he attended Vsevolod Emilyevich Meyerhold's constructivist productions at the Moscow Art Theater, but Gold's stage directions indicate a more broadly futuristic approach than the strictly non-representational and utilitarian set designs called for by constructivism.³⁴ In fact, references to futurism are used repetitively by Gold in his stage directions, such as when he indicates that the sets be designed "by an intelligent futurist like Arthur Dove, Covvarubias, Demuth or Hugo Gellert" (548), that "no curtains or scene changes between the scenes" will produce "an effect of simultaneous planes of action-as in some futurist paintings" (548), and that the final act of the drama should begin with "an outbreak of futurist city music in the style of Edgar Varese" (604).

The aural and visual futurist effects of *Hoboken Blues* would be difficult to achieve in a text meant to read rather than performed, but Gold was convinced that

³³ Michael Folsom and Robert Karoly Sarlos instead detect the influence of Maxim Gorky upon the last of these plays, *Money*. See Folsom, "Education" 233; and Sarlos, *Jig Cook and the Provincetown Players: Theatre in Ferment* (Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1982) 113.

³⁴ For an overview of constructivism and stage design in the Soviet Union, see Georgii Kovalenko, "The Constructivist Stage," *Theatre in Revolution: Russian Avant-Garde Stage Design 1913-1935*, ed. Nancy Van Norman Baer (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1991) 145-55. Although constructivism possessed certain distinct aesthetics, it cannot be entirely separated from other avant-garde movements, particularly cubism, from which Kovalenko argues constructivist stage design evolved, and some of its proponents subsequently moved on to other avant-garde movements, as did Sergei Eisenstein, who designed the sets and costumes for Nikolai Foregger's constructivist production *Good Treatment of Horses* (1922) before beginning his experiments in montage cinema.

the breach between language and visual stimuli was not insurmountable. In fact, he suggested that, in principle, proletarian realism is a "cinema in words" ("Notes of the Month" 5),³⁵ and as if to stress the relationship between proletarian realism and film, all the more advocated that "as few words as possible" (207) be used.³⁶

Whether or not *Jews Without Money* can be considered an example of proletarian realism, it is highly cinematic, as Alfred Kazin has pointed out. Despite his other criticisms of Gold, Kazin credits him for his "remarkable gift for putting wholly visceral experiences into rhythmic series composed of short stabbing sentences. Everything is a single 'shot,' as in the silent movies" ("Introduction" 4). I would argue, though, that *Jews Without Money* is even more cinematic than Kazin

³⁵ In this essay, Gold is careful to note that realism is only one possible form of literary proletarianism and that it would be "dogmatic folly to seize upon any single literature form and erect it into a pattern for all proletarian literature" (206). Oddly, considering his fascination with futurism, as demonstrated by *Hoboken Blues*, only a few years earlier, he continues, "The Russian Futurists, tried to do this; they held the stage for a while, but are rapidly being supplanted" (206).

³⁶ Four years before *Jews Without Money* (and the first volume of John Dos Passos's *U.S.A.*), Gold published his own cinema in words, "Faster, America, Faster! A Movie in Ten Reels," in the November 1926 issue of *New Masses*. Complete with mock silent film intertitles, including an obvious reference to Twain--"A MYSTERIOUS STRANGER WANDERS IN" (140)--"Faster, America, Faster!" simultaneously critiques how technological advancements frequently are restricted to the leisure class and how Hollywood seduces working-class Americans with tales of that same leisure class, much as Mr. Schmidt attempts to seduce "the raw little flapper opposite of him" (141) in Gold's movie, drawing these analyses together in the final image, "America is a private train rushing to Hollywood" (147). Apparently, Gold thought that the effectiveness of a "cinema in words" was not restricted to realism, for structurally, "Faster, America, Faster!" is a combination of inane dialogue and juxtapositions of images far more bizarre than anything to be found in *Jews Without Money*, such as the following: "Gladys La Svelte vomited on the Czarist floor. Everyone laughed like a zoo. Britain supported America and held her head down" (146).

realizes. Gold edits his "shots" to produce the dynamic movement that separates film from theatre, as well as from our normal perception of events. The following passage could easily be broken into establishing shots, cuts, close-ups, and reaction shots:

A fat, haughty prostitute sat on a chair two tenements away. She wore a red kimono decorated with Japanese cherry trees, mountains, waterfalls and old philosophers. Her black hair was fastened by a diamond brooch. At least a million dollars' worth of paste diamonds glittered from her fat fingers.

She was eating an apple. . . .

We scampered around her in a monkey gang. We yelled those words whose terrible meaning we could not fully guess:

"Fifty cents a night!"

. . . The fat prostitute purpled with rage. Her eyes bulged with loathing. Sweat appeared on her painted cheeks. She flung her apple at us, and screamed: "Thieves! American bummers! Loafers! Let me catch you! I'll rip you in half!"

She spat like a poisoned cat. She shook her fist. It was fun.

The whole street was amused. (17-18)

Although most novels contain highly visual sections which could be described using film terminology, there is another way in which *Jews Without Money* could be considered "cinema in words." Commentators of Gold's work almost always refer to

the book as some species of "fictionalized autobiography," yet the narrator records very few of his own actions until the final chapter. In fact, we learn much more about his father, mother, neighbors, and the East Side as an entire community than we do about him. It is as if the narrator is making a documentary of the East Side of his childhood, for the most part remaining behind the camera and in the editing room, and the narrator even suggests that we all edit the histories of our experiences into films when he says, "I can see, in the newsreel of memory, the scene on our roof when I first heard this story" (84). Note that the narrator does not say "the newsreel of *my* memory" but assumes that memory itself is cinematic. While the phrase "the newsreel of memory" is striking enough, it is particularly interesting that the narrator has converted an auditory experience ("I first *heard* this story") into a visual one ("I can *see*").

The Synthesis of Old and New World Ideologies

Merely making written texts cinematic does not produce the abstraction necessary to comprehend universal causes and effects of and solutions to poverty, for numerous movies are melodramas which court sympathy for individual characters without addressing larger economic, ideologic, and social structures. However, use of the cinematic techniques of rapid cuts and juxtaposition of scenes allows for conflicts and contradictions to arise that can lead toward a dialectical understanding of the forces that produce poverty, the effects of that poverty, and means to end poverty. In the passage from *Jews Without Money* detailing the harassment of a

prostitute quoted above, one can detect a simple contradiction which produces a series of concepts. The prostitute is described by the narrator as having "at least a million dollars' worth of paste diamonds" on "her fat fingers" (17). She would have to have infinitely fat fingers to wear that amount of paste. While one could claim "a million dollars' worth" is merely a figure of speech, the complete sentence points out that East Siders are so poor that something normally considered worthless has acquired value, that not only are these Jews bereft of money but of any object which indicates wealth and so they have to find substitutes for those indicators, and that even the adornment of one's body with faux gems is a notable extravagance. When one factors in that a matron of high society or, at the least, an engaged or married woman might be most likely to display an abundance of real diamonds on her fingers but the woman depicted in this scene is a prostitute, the concepts become more complex and reveal crueler injustices. What could be more degrading than having to sell one's body just to acquire the means to please oneself with one's appearance, especially when that appearance is a poor imitation of what the greater society considers fashionable? What could be more degrading to the community than realizing that its equivalent of high society can only be achieved through a pimp- or self-induced slavery because other means of accumulating wealth are denied to its members, unless it be having to confront the fact that displays of matrimonial ties can only occur as the result of a perversion of connubial interactions? And if the woman is able to forget her plight for a moment and enjoy her paste diamonds, the children are there to remind her that not only is she a prostitute but the lowest of that class.

On the broader scale of characters' ideologies, Gold illustrates how the proletariat has not yet achieved class consciousness and by what means that class consciousness might be realized. These ideologies tend to fall on either side of a fault line between Old World notions of community and Judaism and New World individualism and materialism that threaten both community and community-based identities. Gold complicates these ideologies by exposing their internal contradictions. Those East Side Jews who cling to old ways are communal, but their community is insular. There is a dignity in their preservation of traditions which constitute their identity as Jews, but these traditions prove impractical in a cultural and economic milieu which privileges homogeneity. These characters esteem scholarship, but study is viewed as an end in itself rather than a means to improving their material conditions. In contrast, those East Side Jews who forsake Old World Judaism and attempt to assimilate into American society erase boundaries of race and religion but lose any sense of community in the process. Materialism and practicality triumph over Mosaic law but at the expense of dignity and identity. These characters engage in actions intended to protect themselves and others, but their actions are frequently impulsive and only serve to perpetuate suffering.

The most extended dialectical opposition of characters' ideologies in *Jews Without Money* occurs between the narrator's mother and father. The mother's fear and hatred of Christians limits her community religiously, but her community is also circumscribed by class and geography. When Herman, the narrator's father, desires to move his family to affluent Borough Park in Brooklyn, his wife Katie protests,

"But I will be lonesome here. I am used only to plain people; I will miss the neighbors on Chrystie Street" (221). Ultimately, though, Katie's community is familial. Unlike her husband, who made a determined choice to come to America, Katie left Europe after the death of her father at the behest of relatives, who "sent her to America as the last hope for her family. She was to work here and send for her brothers and sisters" (159). Despite her self-proclaimed hatred for Christians, she displays a maternal concern for anyone whom she knows personally, whether this be Betsy, the Italian woman whose husband was sent to prison for murder, Mrs. O'Brien, the Irish woman whose husband beat her, or any number of "Poles, Germans, Italians, Irish and Negroes who worked" (245) with her in a cafeteria and "fell into the habit of telling their complaints" (246) to her.

Herman's response to his wife's philanthropy is to declare that "One has to be selfish in America But you, you neglect your own family to help every passing stranger" (162). Herman has a history of deserting communities if he thinks doing so will improve his own lot, and he lacks sympathy for those whose material needs conflict with his own perceived ones. He presents the initiating cause of his journey to America as a resentment toward the traditional practice of arranged marriages, of which he says, "Here in America it has been forgotten, thank God" (92). For rejecting the marriage arranged for him in Roumania, he is disowned by his own father and excommunicated via curse as well when his father calls him "infidel" (98). In America, Herman is ready to abandon his East Side community when he is offered a chance to purchase a house in Borough Park. He shows little

pity when the foreman he replaces is fired, whereas his wife comments, "It is not right that after working ten years for a boss, a man should be fired, a sick man with a family" (213). Similarly, he rejects unions on the mere possibility that he might one day become wealthy, arguing to Aunt Lena, "So let us imagine then that I go on working hard in my shop for ten years and have made my fortune. All right! So let us imagine, then, one of your union loafers, a Socialist bum, a free-thinker, comes to me and says, Mr. Gold, you are a rich man; give me half of your fortune. So what then? Do you think I should give it to him?" (236).

Herman's quest for self-determination causes him to forsake the communities of which he is a member, but he also constructs a broader sense of community than do his more insular relatives and neighbors. Unlike them, he attempts to participate in American democracy by voting. Granted, his vote is bought by the Tammany Hall machine and he pays for it by being struck in the head with a blackjack, but he, and Baruch Goldfarb, who buys his vote, still participate in a process which other members of Herman's community have decided is not open to them, just as they were not allowed to participate in governmental affairs in Europe. Likewise, Herman reaches out beyond his East European Jewish enclave by inviting an African Jew to dinner, and, unlike Katie, expresses outrage when anyone is killed, Christian or Jew.

Herman's valuation of human life exists, however, only at a level of abstraction, where his compassion need not constrain his pursuit of wealth, and Katie's charity, for the most part, extends only to those whom she can know

personally, as if humanity is a meaningless concept unless it can be perceived directly. Herman's tendency toward abstraction and Katie's orientation toward sensual experience is also represented in their most direct critiques of capitalism: for Herman, a story of a train wreck in a newspaper exhibits the homicidal greed "of the rich American railroads" (163), whereas for Katie, the hamburger steak at the cafeteria where she works confirms that capitalists "don't care if they poison the people, so long as there's money in it" (247), and she substantiates her argument by adding, "I've seen it with my own eyes" (247).

The mother's circumscribed communitarianism and the father's abstracted egalitarianism become reconciled in the narrator. The narrator shares his mother's devotion to comforting others and claims that it was she who instilled in him a concern for the poor, but he also extrapolates a generalization from his mother's example--"The world must be made gracious for the poor!" (158)--whereas she is only explicitly depicted as "helping her neighbors" (158), not an entire class of people. After his conversion to the "workers' Revolution" (309), the narrator's communitarianism is not limited to a cultural, religious, or neighborhood group, as is his mother's, for he stresses he is "one among a million others" (309) suffering the "helpless rage of millions" (309), and he calls this revolution "a whole world movement" (309), all abstractions beyond his mother's ken. Most significantly, far from feeling sentimental about the East Side, as does his mother, he wishes destruction upon it. Although in the "Author's Note" to the 1935 republication of *Jews Without Money* Gold calls his mother a "brave and beautiful proletarian

woman" (12) and "the heroine" (11), the book's conclusion reveals that the narrator has transcended his mother's coping mechanisms of making poverty as tolerable as possible for her community to a desire to eliminate overall the economic inequality which produces dependency upon selfless "saints" such as her.

Much of the narrator's transcendence of his mother's personal philanthropy and avoidance of his father's restricted egalitarianism, which exists only when there is no perceived competition for limited means, occurs through his re-definition of himself. Katie defines herself as Jewish, a mother, and a resident of Chrystie Street, and Herman defines himself as a prospective entrepreneur, definitions which lock them into certain responses to human suffering. None of these identities addresses the economic structure that produces the human suffering detailed in *Jews Without Money*: Katie's identities can exist quite comfortably within economic inequality, and Herman's requires that inequality, as much as he might decry capitalism's worst abuses. By aligning himself as a worker, the narrator reaches out to all in the same position and asserts that collective action is necessary to eliminate suffering, that individual action can alleviate only individual suffering.

Other clashes between Old and New World ideologies are embodied by oppositions between Reb Samuel and Mendel Bum and between Samuel's passive Messianic Judaism and various characters' individualistic violent response to injustice. Reb Samuel's downfall occurs because he wishes to impose traditional Mosaic law within a land where it is not viable. Samuel's congregation wishes to remove their beards to better fit within and engage in commerce with a

predominantly Christian society, yet Samuel cannot fully understand their motivations as his wife's maintenance of the umbrella store prevents him from having to interact with anyone but "other ultra-orthodox factionalists" (197). Although Samuel's position could be lauded as resistance to a coerced and anti-Semitic conformity, in practical terms his orthodoxy imposes an isolationism that would prevent Jews from acquiring economic and political power. On the other hand, Mendel Bum has so thoroughly assimilated that "Jew" becomes an identity that only serves an economic purpose to him. He trades this identity for "money, sacks of potatoes, suits of clothes, various odd jobs, and a chance to learn the cornet" (78) by being baptized, then declares himself a "Jew" again at the narrator's house, explaining that his baptism "is just a way of making a living" (79). The narrator does not seem to reconcile these contradictory ideologies as much as he evades them. His revolutionary "conversion" is phrased in Biblical language--he calls the "Revolution . . . the true Messiah" (309)--but his adoption of "worker" as his primary identity suggests that he believes distinctions of culture and religion are divisive.

Perhaps this lack of reconciliation is due in part to his characterization of European Jews as "a timid bookish lot" (37). Throughout *Jews Without Money*, the narrator is troubled by textual study for its own sake and by a faith based upon patiently waiting for the Messiah. He questions why he must "learn all those Hebrew words" in Chaidler that "don't mean anything" (67) and later declares, "I hated books; they were lies, they had nothing to do with life and work" (305). Most distressing to the narrator is Reb Samuel's assertion that "the Messiah might not

come for many years" and that, when he does, "He would not shoot people down, but would conquer them with love" (190). The narrator admits, "I was disappointed. I needed a Messiah who would look like Buffalo Bill, and who could annihilate our enemies" (190).

The narrator's desire for an immediate and violent defender owes something to an immersion within American popular culture as well as to his friendship with Nigger, who reacts immediately and violently to any slight toward himself or others. Nigger and the gangster Louis One Eye both occasionally act as defenders of the "timid bookish lot," such as when the latter "single-handed, beat up three Italian roughnecks who had pulled the beard of a frightened old Jew" (137), but the narrator records the cycles of violence within which both of these characters become immersed. Louis's attempted murder of his father for abusing his mother lands him in a reformatory where a keeper, "a legal gangster of the State" (128), puts out his eye with a belt buckle. Louis responds to his disfigurement by confronting the world with "hate, lust, scorn and suspicion" (129) and by terrorizing and exploiting members of his own community. When Louis prostitutes Nigger's sister Lily, Nigger's rage is not sated until he himself becomes a gangster and kills Louis, with the concomitant effect, one assumes, of inheriting Louis's position as a terrorizer and exploiter of the community. Although the narrator never becomes a gangster, at his lowest point he does engage in rash attempts to alleviate his suffering, from considering suicide to "develop[ing] a crazy religious streak" to "drinking and whoring with Nigger's crowd" (309).

Praxis, which is absent in passive orthodox Jews, on the one hand, and in thoughtless and violently reactive future gangsters, on the other, develops in the narrator at the conclusion of *Jews Without Money*, and the final sentences of the book also indicate what revolutionary element might be abstracted from Judaism. The narrator notes that the "workers' Revolution" causes him "to think, to struggle" (309) simultaneously and does not privilege either thought or action in isolation, and the religious expectation of paradisiacal existence for all is preserved, but in this case the Messiah is not a separate entity for whom we must wait but is the revolution itself, all workers acting together to create that "garden for the human spirit" (309).

Jews Without Money appears, then, to be more sophisticated than Gold's theorization of proletarianism as the simple conveyance of workers' experiences and environments; however, the book does demonstrate how experience and environment are necessary starting points for the development of class consciousness. The narrator achieves his class consciousness by reconciling the contradictions inherent in all that he observes transpiring in his community, and he serves as an instructive example for those who wish to transcend ideologies which tolerate or even perpetuate poverty and its effects.

CHAPTER 3

The Gastonia Novels

Michael Gold's assertion, in his theorization of proletarian literature, that writers should record their own experiences and communities would seem to suggest that autobiography is the ideal form for the proletarian writer.¹ Nevertheless, a great number of 1930s proletarian novels were based upon actual individual strikes, whether or not their authors participated in those strikes or included fabricated strikes as their central events.² Of those actual strikes upon which novels were based, the

¹ In addition to Gold's *Jews Without Money*, other representative examples of this genre include Agnes Smedley's *Daughter of Earth* (1929) and Jack Conroy's *The Disinherited* (1933). For an extended analysis of proletarian autobiographical fiction, see Foley, *Radical Representations* 284-320. Although taxonomies of proletarian fiction, such as Foley's, are useful in the assessment of proletarianism's various formal and topical characteristics, too strict a categorization can lead to a formalism which stultifies the purpose of proletarian fiction. If the intent of proletarianism is to promote class consciousness and revolutionary action, then the literary means by which these endeavors are accomplished should be measured by their effectiveness rather than by their obedience to conventional consistency. Thus, it is not unusual for a work of proletarian literature to exhibit characteristics of several genres simultaneously. For instance, *Jews Without Money* could as easily be considered a bildungsroman or an experimental novel as it could a fictional autobiography.

² Although the Gastonia novels figure prominently within most discussions of the strike novel genre, Robert Cantwell's *The Land of Plenty* (1934) and Clara Weatherwax's *Marching! Marching!* (1935), both set in the Pacific Northwest and detailing strikes against lumber companies, and, especially, John Steinbeck's *In Dubious Battle* (1936), concerning striking migrant workers, attest to the widespread use of the form and its extension of collective action beyond industrial workers. For studies of the genre and further descriptions of strike novels, see Fay M. Blake, *The Strike in the American Novel* (Metuchen: Scarecrow, 1972); Garrison, "Introduction" x-xi; and Rideout, *The Radical Novel* 172-80. Foley does not classify the strike

most fruitful was the 1929 communist-led National Textile Workers Union of America strike of the Loray Mill in Gastonia, North Carolina.³ The events of this strike were recorded in a series of works later to be collectively referred to as the "Gastonia novels": Mary Heaton Vorse's *Strike!* (1930), Sherwood Anderson's *Beyond Desire* (1932), Olive Tilford Dargan's *Call Home the Heart* (1932, published under the pseudonym Fielding Burke),⁴ Grace Lumpkin's *To Make My Bread* (1932), Dorothy Myra Page's *Gathering Storm: A Story of the Black Belt* (1932),⁵ and

novel as a genre in and of itself, for her distinctions are based upon formal characteristics, but she does note that the "proletarian social novel," which charts relations between numerous characters, usually from differing economic strata, "routinely focuses upon a strike or some other event in the class struggle" (*Radical Representations* 362).

³ For accounts of the Loray Mill strike, see Beal, *Proletarian Journey*; Draper, "Gastonia Revisited;" William F. Dunne, *Gastonia, Citadel of the Class Struggle in the New South*; Grigsby, "The Politics of Protest;" Jo Lynne Haessly, "Mill Mother's Lament;" Hood, "The Loray Mill Strike;" Joyner, "'Up in Old Loray';" McCurry and Ashbaugh, "Gastonia, 1929;" Pope, *Millhands and Preachers*; Reeve, "The Great Gastonia Textile Strike," and "Gastonia;" Salmond, *Gastonia 1929*; Tippet, *When Southern Labor Stirs*; and Weisbord, *A Radical Life*.

⁴ Dargan used the pseudonym Fielding Burke for her three leftist novels--*Call Home the Heart*; *A Stone Came Rolling* (1935), a sequel to *Call Home the Heart*; and *Sons of the Stranger* (1947)--but published her drama, poetry, and short fiction under her own name.

⁵ Myra Page was the pen name of Dorothy Markey, but, unlike Dargan, Markey used this pen name for all of her published work, including *Southern Cotton Mills and Labor* (New York: Worker's Library, 1929), which she developed from the research for her dissertation. Although Markey used the pseudonym "Dorothy Myra Page" for *Gathering Storm*, she shortened her pen name to "Myra Page" for all subsequent works. See Baker 109 for Markey's rationale for adopting a pseudonym.

William Rollins, Jr.'s *The Shadow Before* (1934).⁶

That numerous novelists would include events from this strike within their work is not surprising, considering the massive attention it received nationally and internationally.⁷ Although the Loray Mill strike was hardly the largest textile workers' strike of the late 1920s, not even in the South,⁸ and not one of the strikers' demands was met, a combination of the sensationalistic nature of the strike, brutal local resistance to it, and the Communist Party's determination to make "Gastonia . . . the outstanding symbol of the developing class struggle throughout the United States and the world" (*Why Every Worker Should Join the Communist Party* 4) ensured the strike's notoriety. Five National Guard units, with whom women strikers battled,

⁶ At least two other novels based in part upon the events of the Gastonia strike and the subsequent trials of some of its leaders and participants have been published, Willie Snow Ethridge's *Mingled Yarn* (1938) and Hiram Collins Haydn's *The Time Is Noon* (1948), but the dates of their publication cause them to fall outside the scope of this study. Leslie Fiedler suggests that Clara Weatherwax's *Marching! Marching!* is also based upon the Gastonia strike, but there seems to be little evidence for such a claim ("The Two Memories" 15). Some commentators also include in this collective Olive Tilford Dargan's *A Stone Came Rolling* (1935) and Grace Lumpkin's *A Sign for Cain* (1935), although neither of these novels directly draws upon the events of the Gastonia strike.

⁷ In addition to the presence of journalists from many prominent northern and regional newspapers, especially during the trials, Draper notes that "by mid-1929, the entire Communist world took up the cause of Gastonia. Protest demonstrations were staged in England, Germany, Denmark and elsewhere" (16). For a more detailed account of the international reaction, see Christina Baker and William J. Baker, "Shaking All the Corners of the Sky: The Global Response to the Gastonia Strike of 1929," *Canadian Review of American Studies* 21.3 (1990): 321-31.

⁸ Compare the 1,800-2,000 Gastonia strikers to the more than 20,000 participants of the 1926 Passaic, New Jersey, textile workers' strike and to the 5,000 that engaged in walk-outs at two plants at Elizabethton, Tennessee, in 1929.

appeared on the third day of the strike; "strikers were clubbed and beaten in the streets and carried off to jail *en masse*" (Tippett 86-87); workers were evicted from their houses; vigilantes burned the union headquarters to the ground; and the strike culminated in the fatal shooting of Chief of Police Orville Aderholt⁹ and two trials of strikers and strike leaders for his murder, the second of which resulted in eight convictions. All of these events were faithfully recorded and disseminated by the Communist Party organs *Labor Defender* and *Daily Worker*.

Notoriety, however, was not the sole reason that the Gastonia novelists chose to fictionalize the events of the Loray Mill strike. Five of them had personal knowledge of the strike or of Southern textile mills and labor struggles as a whole: Vorse decided to go to Gastonia on her own to report upon the strike; Page conducted research for her dissertation in Gastonia; the Communist Party sent Lumpkin to the Loray Mill strike "to observe and participate" (Sowinska, Introduction xii); Dargan, who lived near Asheville, North Carolina, at the time, "visited both Gastonia and Marion during the period of the strikes" (Shannon 441); and *Beyond Desire* was informed by Anderson's journeys to various factories throughout the South, including the textile mills in Elizabethton, Tennessee.

If 1930s American proletarian fiction were as formulaic in content, style, and politics as many of its critics have attested, then the Gastonia novels, all based upon the same events, would possess a greater degree of similitude than they do. Rather

⁹ There has been speculation that Aderholt was shot by one of his own deputies. See Salmond 146-50 for arguments to this effect, although he cautions against jumping to such a conclusion.

than following guidelines suggested by ideologues such as Granville Hicks, however, these novels reflect the diverse aesthetics and politics of their authors. Considering that their authors varied in age, degree of connection to the Communist Party, extent of literary reputation, gender, and geographic origin and residence, these novels present in microcosm a superb demonstration that American proletarian literature was a broad-based movement whose practitioners pulled the movement, aesthetically and politically, in contrasting and sometimes conflicting directions. Furthermore, the structures of these novels present different models of how class consciousness may be achieved. *Strike!*, being a work of reportage, emphasizes immediate and imaginative re-experience of events by readers as an adequate means of reaching class consciousness. In contrast, the historical novels *Gathering Storm* and *To Make My Bread* suggest that class consciousness must develop over time, that it may take several generations before class consciousness emerges within workers. Through its intense focus upon a single protagonist, *Call Home the Heart* contests a model of class consciousness based upon infinite progression; instead, the novel reveals momentary regressions to pre-radical ideologies that should be expected when oppositional worldviews collide. Finally, *Beyond Desire* and *The Shadow Before* replace linear narrative structures with explorations of the lives and psychologies of numerous characters from different classes as means of encouraging in readers a more comprehensive and abstract understanding of the effects of capitalism.

Although certain concerns that played a part in the Gastonia strike or were frequently present in proletarian literature overall can be found in each of the novels

evaluated in this chapter, the degree to which these concerns are emphasized in the Gastonia novels varies. Thus, my attention to these concerns will also vary.

Whereas contesting racist ideology plays an important role in all of the novels except for *Strike!*, only *Call Home the Heart* and *Beyond Desire* engage in significant explorations of sexuality, and only *Gathering Storm* and *To Make My Bread* provide an extensive enough historical scope for their analysis to be facilitated by Raymond Williams's categories of the dominant, residual, and emergent.

Reportage and the Radicalization of the Middle Class

Previous to publishing *Strike!*, her fifteenth book, Mary Heaton Vorse had been an integral member of bohemian Greenwich Village during the first two decades of the twentieth century, a feminist and advocate of women's suffrage, a labor activist, and an established popular author.¹⁰ Of most relevance to *Strike!*, however, is Vorse's career as one of the premier American labor journalists of the first half of the twentieth century. From her "conversion" to radicalism during the 1912 Lawrence, Massachusetts, textile mill worker strike led by the IWW, a strike she covered for *Harper's Weekly*, until the end of the 1930s, she covered almost every major American strike, and she was among the first northern journalists to cover the

¹⁰ For biographical information on Vorse, see Dee Garrison, *Mary Heaton Vorse: The Life of an American Insurgent* (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1989). See also Mary Heaton Vorse, *A Footnote to Folly: Reminiscences of Mary Heaton Vorse* (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1935); *Rebel Pen: The Writings of Mary Heaton Vorse*, ed. Dee Garrison (New York: Monthly Review, 1985); and *Time and the Town: A Provincetown Chronicle* (1942; New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1991).

wave of textile mill strikes that hit North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee in 1929.¹¹ Vorse arrived in Gastonia on April 25, twenty-four days after the strike began and a week after the Committee of One Hundred, a vigilante group "composed of superintendents, foremen, specially privileged employees, professional thugs and special police deputies" (Dunne 7) destroyed the original union headquarters. During the six weeks that Vorse covered the Gastonia strike for *Harper's*, she roomed in the same boardinghouse as Vera Buch, the second-in-command to the overall strike leader Fred Beal.

Vorse's role as journalist informs the structure of her novelization of the strike. *Strike!* reports the events of the Loray Mill strike so faithfully that Sinclair Lewis, in his *Nation* review, labelled the book "more a statement of facts than a novel" (474), and James R. Urgo considers it "one of the earliest examples of the 'instant book' which paperback book publishers would perfect thirty years later" (68). All of the major events of the strike are represented in the novel, with the exception that the concluding chapters are based upon the carnage at a subsequent strike in

¹¹ Vorse begins her autobiography *A Footnote to Folly: The Reminiscences of Mary Heaton Vorse* with the Lawrence strike and locates it as the moment of her transformation into a radical, but Garrison notes a number of events previous to that strike which contributed to a more gradual transformation, among them a 1904 Italian general strike Vorse observed while she was in Venice, her raising funds for pure milk for immigrant children in 1911 as part of the New York Milk Committee, and her witnessing of the 1911 Triangle fire. See Garrison, *Mary Heaton Vorse* 32-33 and 48-51. For a sampling of Vorse's labor reportage from 1912-1959, see *Rebel Pen* 27-257.

Marion, North Carolina, upon which Vorse reported after leaving Gastonia.¹² In addition, there are many one-to-one correspondences between actual people and places and their fictional counterparts, frequently with little attempt to mask those correspondences. The action transpires in Stonerton, and Vorse renames Fred Beal "Ferdinand Deane" and the Manville-Jenckes company, which owned the Loray Mill, "the Basil Schenck company." In some cases, Vorse hardly bothers to alter fully the names of important figures and groups. Daisy McDonald is split into the characters Daisy West and May McDonald, Violet Jones and Binnie Green appear as Violet Black and Binney Jolas, respectively, and the Committee of One Hundred retains its moniker.¹³

Vorse further foregrounds the journalistic nature of *Strike!* by using the journalist Roger Hewlett as the primary point of view throughout the novel; moreover, he is the first character to be named. The novel begins *in medias res* at

¹² M. Keith Booker suggests that Vorse ends by referring to the Marion strike because Beal and the other NTWU members who were convicted of conspiracy to murder did not flee to the Soviet Union until she finished *Strike!*, but quite possibly Vorse felt that the dissolution of the Gastonia strike was an unfitting conclusion for a revolutionary novel. See Booker, *The Modern American Novel of the Left: A Research Guide* (Westport: Greenwood, 1999) 337.

¹³ Other correspondences are less obvious. Police Chief Aderholt, Vera Buch, and Ella May Wiggins are transformed into Dick Humphries, Irma Rankin, and Mamie Lewes, respectively. Urgo suggests that "Irma's last name, Rankin, is a play on 'rank and file'" (69), but, since Vera Buch was one of the strike leaders sent to Gastonia by the Communist Party, it seems odd that Vorse would consider her one of the "rank and file." Garrison claims that Irma Rankin "is a composite figure based on Vera Buch and the other women organizers Vorse met at Gastonia" (Introduction xiv), but Rankin parallels Buch through her position of leadership and rivalry with Fer Deane (Fred Beal).

the beginning of the third week of the strike, when Hewlett decides to report on it; the strike up until that point, the conditions which led to it and other strikes throughout the Carolinas and Tennessee, and the national response to those strikes are summarized in two brief paragraphs. Neither of these paragraphs contains any information or perspectives that Hewlett could not have gathered from newspaper accounts. Readers of *Strike!* are effectively plunged directly into events without the context amid which those events took place being established prior to the action of the narrative, and readers gain a deeper understanding of southern class structure and labor relations through experiencing those events, as does Hewlett and as did Vorse herself.

This attempt to elide spatial and temporal distances between reader and event was, during the 1930s, commonly referred to as "reportage," a major genre of radical literature. Although reportage is related to journalism, especially in its immediacy--ideally, reportage would reach readers while the reported event was still in process--the editors of *Proletarian Literature in the United States* differentiate the two genres according to criteria of effect and purpose and liken reportage to fiction:

Reportage must do much more than merely answer the questions, who, why, when, where. That is not enough. It must answer these questions--plus. That plus makes all the difference. It helps the reader *experience* the event recorded. Reportage is three-dimensional reporting. The writer not only condenses reality; he must get his reader to see and feel the facts. (Hicks, et al. 211; original emphasis)

Sensate perception of events is not an end in itself, however. Reportage does not make a pretense to indifferent objectivity; rather, if effective, the experience it produces in readers "in turn induces a mode of action" (211).¹⁴

Although *Strike!* is considerably longer than most pieces of reportage and is usually labeled a novel, redefining it as reportage might help account for some of its supposed failings as a novel as well as foreground the "mode of action" it attempts to induce. In addition to Lewis's assertion that *Strike!* is closer to journalism than fiction, reviewers for the *New York Times* and *Saturday Review of Literature* commended the book for its treatment of the Gastonia strike while denigrating its worth as a novel.¹⁵ More recently, Joseph R. Urgo has called *Strike!* "by no means a good novel," for it "is repetitive and it includes entirely too many events to allow it a necessary coherence" (69).¹⁶ Apparently, a faithful representation of a strike makes for good journalism but not for a good story in that readers, or at least reviewers, of novels expect that the chaos of history will be subordinated to the interests of

¹⁴ As should be expected, the editors of *Proletarian Literature in the United States*, several of whom also served as editors of *New Masses*, chose to define reportage as necessarily politically motivated. For a more comprehensive and less radical evaluation of reportage, see William Stott, *Documentary Expression and Thirties America* (New York: Oxford UP, 1973).

¹⁵ See Hershell Brickell, "Gastonia's Tragedy," rev. of *Strike!*, by Mary Heaton Vorse, *Saturday Review of Literature* (11 Oct. 1930): 198; and "The Gastonia Mills," rev. of *Strike!*, by Mary Heaton Vorse, *New York Times* (11 Nov. 1930): 6.

¹⁶ In contrast, Sylvia Jenkins Cook, while considering "the purely aesthetic successes of *Strike!* . . . very limited indeed," argues that Vorse's book "achieves through the form of the novel a sense of the local, irrational, very human aspects of Gastonia that the fine journalism could not so effectively explore" (97).

character or thematic development.

Commentators have, indeed, established various protagonists and themes for *Strike!* For instance, Sylvia Jenkins Cook claims that "the novel is heroless, or rather it has as multiple hero the entire body of strikers" (94) as well as a villain composed of mill owners, local newspaper editors, ministers, middle-class denizens of Stonerton, and working-class strikebreakers and vigilantes, whom Vorse collectively labels the "mob." Other critics, most notably Dee Garrison and James Urgo, have argued that *Strike!* is a feminist work which "focus[es] on the distinctly female experience of the working class" (Garrison, Introduction xx) and critiques the "sexism within the Communist Party" (Urgo 70) that replicates "the bourgeois myth of masculinity" (70), and thus "actually works against its own goals" (70).¹⁷ In addition, *Strike!* may cause readers to ponder "the ideological dynamic of mass psychology" (Garrison, Introduction xvii) and to recognize residual inequalities in progressive movements, but these meditative undertakings do not necessarily constitute "a mode of action" produced by reportage. If the work is read as a piece of reportage, then the reader's transformative experience becomes more important than the internal consistency of the work. In essence, the reader becomes the protagonist during the process of reading and develops class consciousness through identification with the workers depicted in *Strike!*, and this development of class consciousness constitutes a mode of action that should extend beyond the moment of

¹⁷ For an argument that *Strike!* is only nominally feminist, see Laura Hapke, *Daughters of the Great Depression: Women, Work, and Fiction in the American 1930s* 157-161.

reading.

Vorse facilitates this development of class consciousness through the journalist Roger Hewlett. Hewlett "reads" the Stonerton strike in the same way that one reads Vorse's text: he records the words of strikers and observes events, but he does not participate directly in those events. Roger Hewlett acts as a camera eye similar to the narrator in *Jews Without Money*, with two major exceptions: while Gold's narrator is impoverished and a member of the East Side community he describes, Hewlett is decidedly middle-class and not part of the Stonerton community. Nevertheless, *Strike!* ends with Hewlett, during the funeral for Fer Deane and three other murdered strikers, devoting himself to class struggle despite his class origin:

Yes, thought Roger, that's the answer. "We jes' gotta go on."

We can't help ourselves. They are a part of a flowering stream of workers. They had no choice in the matter. They had to go on.

And he had to go on, too. He had lost his own class; he could never belong in their class of the workers. He was without country now, and yet wherever they went, whatever their destination might be, he had to go with them. (235-236)

Although the workers achieve class consciousness through the strike and martyrdom of its leaders,¹⁸ Hewlett's transformation extends the possible radicalizing effect of

¹⁸ Cook, although noting that "the objective ideology of the strikers does advance, albeit unevenly, against the subjective limitations of the individuals involved" (97), contends that the workers meld labor activism with a pre-radical ideology, for they "see the union not as a rational means of organizing but as something mystical, more akin to religion" (95).

Strike! beyond parameters of class, culture, and geographical region. As John M.

Reilly puts it:

What Roger Hewlett feels, any reader might feel also. His conversion through imaginative apprehension of workers' lives and the application of reason to understanding their cause replicates the conversion of a middle-class author or intellectual to radical politics and authenticates the role of the so-called fellow traveler for readers aware of the gap between their lives and the lives of the class supposed to embody the progressive thrust of history. (507)

In fact, Vorse encourages readers to identify with Hewlett rather than with the striking workers by portraying the South and southern workers as foreign and unknowable. Ed Hoskins, a second journalist, comments, "The South's hard to understand. No one understands it, not even the Southerners. Fer doesn't understand it and he knows he doesn't understand it" (8). In the first chapter, Fer and Irma reveal to Hewlett that they face greater violence in Stonerton than they have during any northern strike, and Irma adds, "We're much more comfortable with the foreign workers, in the North. We understand them. We even understand their religious background better" (12). And Vorse attempts to replicate the speech patterns of the poor white millhands, whereas Vorse's "northern workers, despite their ethnic diversity, often [speak] in the grandly structured grammar of educated New Englanders" (Garrison, Introduction xv). This use of dialect further distances the reporter and reader from the subject and the subjected.

An analogous distancing between strike participants and those observing the strike--Hewlett, the assumed readers of *Strike!*, and Vorse herself--occurs at the levels of political orientation and economic class. Whereas certain Gastonia novelists were committed to furthering the cause of communism through their narratives of the strike's events, Vorse was critical of the Communist Party and felt that it substituted ideological directives for the economic support and organizational structure necessary for winning a strike.¹⁹ One point upon which Vorse and the Communist organizers of the Gastonia strike, particularly Vera Buch, disagreed was the courting of liberal sympathy and support. According to Dee Garrison, "Vorse urged the strike leaders to organize the middle-class women to provide a milk fund for the strikers' children. The organizers laughed at her naive assessment of southern culture; no middle-class women here would do that. Again, Vorse suggested that working women and their children form marches, to be publicized and to elicit liberal support" (*Mary Heaton Vorse* 221).²⁰

The fellow-traveler approach of *Strike!* is a far cry from Gold's call for proletarian literature by and for proletarians, but in the sense that a significant

¹⁹ Vorse resisted including such criticisms in her published accounts of the strike, perhaps because she did not want to cloud support for the strike itself, but they are contained within the journal she kept while she was in Gastonia. For a summary of Vorse's misgivings about how the strike was run, see Garrison, *Mary Heaton Vorse* 219-221. Interestingly, Fred Beal, the leader of strike and a former Wobbly, was also critical of the Communist Party hierarchy. See his *Proletarian Journey* 139-42, passim.

²⁰ Vorse's attempts to court liberal support would continue after she returned to her home in Provincetown, Massachusetts. See Garrison, *Mary Heaton Vorse* 225-226 for a summary of these activities.

portion of proletarian literature was created by middle-class converts for the purpose of converting others from the middle class to radical politics, it is a representative work. Of course, there is always the danger of slipping into the position of Floyd Dell, who indicated that his radicalism did not necessitate a change in his own material conditions when he wrote, "I most emphatically do not wish to become like those proletarian heroes that Mike [Gold] has been telling us about" ("Explanations and Apologies" 26), and Vorse apparently saw little irony in returning to Provincetown after reporting on labor struggles, purchasing a sailboat with proceeds from her articles on those struggles, and spending "the days of summer sailing, hiking, and partying with the Provincetown intelligentsia" (Garrison, *Mary Heaton Vorse* 225).²¹ Likewise, viewing the proletariat from a middle-class position could easily fall into Dell's patronizing assumption that, instead of working toward a comprehensive reconfiguration of base and superstructure, workers aspire "to be--like the middle class" ("Explanations and Apologies" 26). Vorse was not immune from such patronization, as is reflected by the "luxury women's clothing" she gave Ella May Wiggins and of which Vera Buch said years later, "It was a great mistake on [Vorse's] part to imagine that poor despised textile workers coveted these luxuries women have. The gift of it was Vorse's feeling of guilt that she had all these lovely

²¹ Since the 1910s political radicals were part of the same circles as artists and the intelligentsia from Greenwich Village and Provincetown. Usually, however, those radicals came from either the leadership of unions and political parties or, as in the cases of Max Eastman and John Reed, from that intelligentsia itself. The possibility of interacting with industrial workers was rather limited for those who confined themselves to Greenwich Village and Provincetown.

things while the strikers were so dirt poor" (qtd. in Garrison, *Mary Heaton Vorse* 358 n.38). The distance between strikers and reporters remains problematic throughout *Strike!*, especially considering the purported goal of Vorse's reportage here is to win over the middle class.

The Historical Novel and Proletarian Class Consciousness

For stories told from the perspective of workers, it is necessary to turn to Lumpkin's and Page's fictional accounts. Reviewers for the *New Masses* highlighted the class allegiances of *To Make My Bread* and *Gathering Storm*. A. B. Magil notes that in *To Make My Bread*, Lumpkin "has written not as an outsider, not as a superior intellectual itching with social curiosity, but as one of the working class" (20).²² Esther Lowell begins her review of *Gathering Storm* by stressing that Page had effectively reached her assumed audience: "'Workers down in Birmingham like Myra Page's book, *Gathering Storm*,' one of the southern organizers told me. What better compliment to a book that was written about workers for workers to read?" (29).²³

²² Magil continues, "And in the course of her book one learns what she believes: she believes that the working class and the capitalist class have nothing in common and their interests are sharply opposed; . . . she believes in the power of the working class to create its own leadership and, through struggle, to win its freedom" (20).

²³ Lowell does suggest, however, that the specificity of Page's audience detracts from the novel's potential influence:

But if the southern workers are enjoying it, some others have not found it so easy to read. A northern worker told me that she could not push through half the book. She found the southern dialect too difficult, just as a southern worker would find it hard to read about

Certain biographical affinities between Lumpkin and Page may account partially for their greater attention to the lives of mill workers. Both women spent their childhood years in the South, albeit within formerly aristocratic families, served as YWCA industrial secretaries, moved toward the Communist Party in the 1920s, and wrote for communist-affiliated periodicals throughout the 1920s and 1930s.²⁴ More importantly, before the Gastonia strike Lumpkin and Page devoted considerable attention to southern mill workers. Page conducted research in Gastonia as well as in several mill villages surrounding Greenville, South Carolina, for her dissertation, "Some Behavior Patterns of Southern Textile Workers," for which she was awarded a doctorate in sociology from the University of Minnesota in 1928. During her early adulthood, Lumpkin developed adult education programs and spent her summers in the North Carolina mountains, frequently rooming with mill workers.

northern workers if it were written in Yiddish-American dialect. The dialect of *Gathering Storm* is faithfully done, but perhaps there is too much of it for the average reader. (29)

More recently, M. Keith Booker has argued that Page's tendency to reiterate points implicit in the narrative, a tendency which other commentators have labelled didactic and propagandistic, indicates that the work was intended "for working-class readers [rather] than for sophisticated critics" (242). For less favorable evaluations of *Gathering Storm*, see Cook 118-23; Hapke 163-66; Reilly 507-508; and Urgo 73-76, wherein it is deemed "a virtual showcase of Party doctrine with almost no literary merit" (73).

²⁴ Page joined the Communist Party in 1925, but Lumpkin was never officially a Party member. At various times, the *Daily Worker* and the *New Masses* hired Page as a reporter, and Lumpkin became part of the *New Masses* staff in 1928 and contributed occasional pieces to the *Daily Worker*. For detailed biographies of Page and Lumpkin, see Christina Looper Baker, *In a Generous Spirit: A First-Person Biography of Myra Page* (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1996); and Suzanne Sowinska, Introduction, *To Make My Bread*, by Grace Lumpkin (1932; Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1995) vii-xliii.

Although their intimate knowledge of mill workers' experiences and their political orientation may have caused Lumpkin and Page to present the Gastonia strike from the perspective of workers, it is the structure of their novels which immerses readers within that perspective. Instead of filtering the events of the strike through outside observers, they construct detailed historical narratives which chart the movement of families from agrarian subsistence to industrial employment as well as the subsequent evolution in class consciousness and participation in union activism among workers. Both Lumpkin and Page devote far more space to recording the experience of those who became mill workers in the decades preceding the wave of southern textile mill strikes in the late 1920s than to the strike in Gastonia itself, an allocation of narrative that troubled some contemporary reviewers.²⁵ Reviewers who labeled *Gathering Storm* and *To Make My Bread* "Gastonia novels" may have misconstrued the thematic emphases of these works. In contrast to Vorse's *Strike!*, which focuses upon the events of and participants in the Gastonia strike to the exclusion of all else, the subject of Lumpkin's and Page's novels is not the strike itself but the development of class consciousness among workers and the historical circumstances which facilitate that development.

Two aspects of Raymond Williams's cultural theory can inform a reading of

²⁵ Magil comments that "the Gastonia strike, does not appear in [*To Make My Bread*] till the last fifty pages. . . . [and so the novel] seems a little out of proportion" (20), and a reviewer for the *New Republic* suggests that Page would have produced a better novel had *Gathering Storm* reduced its scope and attended more to "the direct record of actual happenings in the Gastonia strikes" (290). See Rev. of *Gathering Storm*, by Dorothy Myra Page, *New Republic* 19 Apr. 1933: 290.

these two novels and how they present a change in consciousness among workers over several decades. First, the varied inter- and intragenerational responses to urbanization and wage labor exhibit characteristics of Williams's categories of the dominant, the residual, and the emergent, whereby any culture at any moment is constituted not only by dominant or hegemonic social formations and institutions but also by residual elements "of some previous social and cultural institution and formation" (122) and by emergent "meanings and values, new practices, new relationships and kinds of relationship" (123). Residual elements of past social formations may exist because the current dominant culture excludes certain realms of human experience, but the dominant culture can also strengthen its hegemony by incorporating residual elements so that past alternative or even oppositional cultures will be subsumed by the dominant. Likewise, the emergent can be alternative or oppositional if it foregrounds social relations, experiences, and practices which the dominant culture excludes or ignores, or it can be incorporated by the hegemony as "some new phase of the dominant culture" (123).

Since the emergent cannot be articulated fully at the moment of its emergence because it represents an embryonic stage of cultural formation, it is necessary to turn to another facet of Williams's cultural theory. Williams uses the term "structures of feeling" to indicate a nascent consciousness formed by "tension between the received interpretation and practical experience," a tension which is "often an unease, a stress, a displacement, a latency: the moment of conscious comparison not yet come, often not even coming" (130). An important element of Williams's "structures of feeling"

is that changes in consciousness and social relations "do not have to await definition, classification, or rationalization before they exert palpable pressures and set effective limits on experience and on action" (132). "Structures of feeling" are particularly useful when addressing a pre-emergent consciousness, one which does not yet have language to express or an intellectual process to understand feelings and phenomena.

Gathering Storm and *To Make My Bread* illustrate dominant, residual, and emergent elements of culture through a displacement of the families who are the main characters of the texts. Both novels begin in the mountains of Appalachia at or before the beginning of the twentieth century and present a spatial movement from a dominant rural culture to mill villages where that previously dominant culture becomes residual. They also suggest that dominant industrial capitalism simultaneously benefits from residual elements of culture and, through the revelation of its internal contradictions, assists the formation of the emergent. In each novel, a family patriarch resists leaving Appalachia for the mill villages, and, once in the mill villages, is unable to make the transition from subsistence farming to wage labor. In contrast, these novels present family matriarchs for whom the cultural and material conditions of mountain communities cannot fulfill desires they have for themselves and their children and who exhibit emergent values, whether these be middle-class values connected to an encroaching industrial capitalism which is threatening to eliminate more traditional ways of life or radical values opposed to industrial capitalism.

Page's *Gathering Storm* begins with Ole Marge Marlow recounting to her

granddaughter, Young Marge Crenshaw, the family's journey shortly after the Civil War from the mountains to the cotton mill towns of Georgia and, eventually, to those surrounding Greenville, South Carolina. The catalyst for this journey was a representative from the mills who came to the mountains to recruit workers with tales of prosperity and education for children. Ole Marge's husband, Henry, counters by stressing the rural connection between land, lineage, and history--"My pappy 'n my grandpappy lived right here in this cabin, 'n I was born here, 'n I reckon I'll die here" (15)--and by expressing his fears of racial integration. Henry disappears from Page's text before the conclusion of the second chapter, but Ole Marge's brief mentions of him reflect his continuing resistance to accepting urbanization and wage labor as suitable replacements for his prior connection between self and land. He complains that "folks was too close here, livin' right on top of tother" (22), and he requests that he be buried next to his cabin in the mountains. Ole Marge notes another residual element of Appalachian culture which persists within the dominant structure of the mill villages. While family feuds cannot be said to be oppositional to the hegemony of the mill villages in the way that collective action would be, and, indeed, while they may present an obstacle to class solidarity, they do depict an alternative rule of law. A confrontation between the Allens and the Marlows, during which a "bullet near hit that mill agent in the seat of his pants" (23), highlights this threat. The end result is that the mill hegemony is forced to make some concessions to residual Appalachian culture, and "from then on, the mill'd give orders to its agents, not to mix up no mo' clans" (24).

Ole Marge also exhibits some residual traits, such as when she brags that it was "lucky fer the Allens, the laws cleared 'em out of town afore they had to be took out, heels furst" (23), but, for the most part, she primarily expresses emergent values throughout *Gathering Storm*. Within the dominant structure of rural Appalachian culture, her emergent values are concordant with capitalist middle-class values, for she seeks education for her children and refuses to romanticize an existence within nature, particularly if that natural existence requires extensive labor for the most menial of tasks. One particular allure of the mill villages for her is the promise of "a water pump in each block" (14), since she has to journey hundreds of yards in all weather to retrieve water from a creek. Once she recognizes that all the promises of modern facilities and education are hollow, she, unlike her husband and her daughter Sal, does not desire to return to the mountains. Instead, she argues "what we had to do was make the mill do what they'd a-promised" because she realizes that "thar'd never be schools or nothin' in the mountains" (22). From this point on, Ole Marge expresses emergent proletarian values of class solidarity and class struggle. She recounts to her granddaughter a history of walk-outs and strikes and argues to her that wars and racial animosity only benefit the ruling classes, that differences of wealth are the result of exploitation, and that religion often functions to justify such exploitation and to diffuse potential revolutionary action.

Unfortunately, Page does not illustrate how Ole Marge comes to these positions but merely implies that her experiences led her to them. Structurally, however, *Gathering Storm* effectively excludes those experiences, for in the first two

chapters, Ole Marge summarizes nearly a half-century of history, from the 1870s until shortly before World War I. Furthermore, Page does not indicate why Ole Marge would become radicalized while her daughter Sal retains the segregationist attitudes of her father and immerses herself in religion and memories of the mountains instead of confronting economic inequality and its material effects. When Page does present examples of a character's movement from one value system to another, that movement transpires quickly and with little struggle. For instance, in Page's narrative, Tom Crenshaw's psychological struggle to overcome his racism after being rescued from drowning by Fred Morgan merits only two paragraphs:

Tom, dripping and still dazed, was looking with mingled gratitude and chagrin into the face of his benefactor. For the man who had saved him was Fred Morgan, the Negro.

Tom went about his work for the next week, torn by conflicting emotions and ideas. Gratitude to Fred Morgan for risking his life to save his, vied with resentment that he owed his life to a nig--one of them. The old emotional antagonism, prejudice, not entirely up-rooted, struggled against his newer convictions. (85)

Rather than depicting events and the resultant crises of values they produce within characters over time, Page adopts a model of tutelage, whereby already radicalized workers guide the development of others: Ole Marge instructs Young Marge; the Wobblies Jake Martin and Fred Morgan instruct Tom Crenshaw, once he reaches New York City and becomes a longshoreman; and Tom, in turn, instructs his

sister, Young Marge, by sending her radical texts unavailable at the mill village library, among them Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*. While undoubtedly many radicals are assisted in their progress by mentor figures, one is left with the assumption that Ole Marge was born a radical or defies the normative procedure of the novel by not needing a mentor figure herself. By presenting radicalism as developed through tutelage and excluding Ole Marge from that process, Page runs into a problem of origins. "From whence does radicalism arise?" is a question *Gathering Storm* refuses to answer.

In contrast, Lumpkin's *To Make My Bread* presents a transition from a dominant mountain culture through a state of pre-emergence characterized by Williams's "structures of feeling" to a concluding radicalism in the third generation of the family portrayed, with relatively little intervention from mentor figures.²⁶ *To Make My Bread* begins similarly to *Gathering Storm* in that the first third of the novel transpires in the Appalachian village of Swain's Crossing and presents a patriarch who is comfortable within this dominant culture yet resists transition to the dominance of industrial capitalism by clinging to old values. Among these are Grandpap's fear of racial integration, his association of land with lineage and history, and his one-to-one correspondence between individual identity and land. Also similar to *Gathering Storm* is the matriarchal figure Emma, Grandpap's daughter, who finds

²⁶ Amy Godine suggests that, in novels such as *To Make My Bread*, the "relative invisibility of . . . leader types only underscores their power" (211). See "Notes Toward a Reappraisal of Depression Literature," *Prospects: An Annual of American Cultural Studies* 5 (1980): 197-239.

mountain culture insufficient, particularly in the lack of education for children. Unlike Ole Marge in *Gathering Storm*, however, Emma does not come with her proletarian class consciousness fully formed. Throughout *To Make My Bread* she expresses vague tensions and discomfort with the system of industrial labor in Leesville, Lumpkin's fictional counterpart to Gastonia, such as her fear that "Maybe all this will change us. Maybe in a year we won't be the same--Grandpap or any of us" (157).²⁷

Her apprehensions regarding the gap between the promised rewards of labor and the actual exploitation of her and her neighbors' labor are superb representations of Williams's structures of feelings, as she has no new language or economic philosophy through which to express the injustice she senses; instead, she has to fall back upon previously received notions of the grotesque to express the injustice she senses. She begins to fantasize that the factory is a machine that eats workers ("The people entering the door of the mill seemed to Emma as if they were corn being fed into a hopper to be ground up" [195]), and then mythicizes her wage slavery further by blending it with fairy-tales:

There was a story the teacher told the young ones at school,

²⁷ Throughout her years as a mill employee, Emma recognizes those dreaded changes in herself and other emigres from the mountains:

In the mountains she had thought of round silver dollars dropping into her lap, and of buying good food and fine things in the stores. But the people she had seen did not look as if they were used to many dollars. The women looked anxious about the mouth and fearful of something, and the men walked doggedly as if this was something they had to do, and they were going to get it done, simply for that reason. (195)

and Bonnie, playing teacher, told it over to the children at home.

"And the ogre said, 'I'll grind your bones to make my bread,'" [sic]

At first the throb of the mill had been like the throb of a big heart beating for the good of those who worked under the roof, for it gave hope of desires to be fulfilled. . . .

Now to Emma the throb had changed. She was feeling the grind of teeth. The mill crunched up and down--"I'll grind your bones to make my bread." (219)

Similarly, Grandpap can express his anger toward the exploitation of labor only through religious analogy: "Hit's like in the Bible when they used to put babies in the red hot arms of the idol. I'm a-getting to believe the factory's an idol that people worship and hit wants the young for a sacrifice" (201).

Emma and her friend Ora differ from Grandpap, whose reaction to the exploitation of labor he suffers is framed thoroughly in terms of a residual ideology, for they do begin to develop an economic understanding of capitalism, such as when Ora notes that owning stock in a company "means ye get money without working" (223). Later, Ora reflects upon the injustice of this in a conversation with Emma regarding a baby of wealthy parents. While her anger is unfocused and, as such, presents inequality as an unknowable and perhaps unalterable force, her anger does indicate that she is no longer acquiescent toward the economic structure which does not benefit her or her family:

Yet going up the street, right after we left hit, I started feeling s' mad.

Mad at everything and at nothing, because my babies couldn't have a thing. I was s' mad. Hit was why I spit out at ye, that and being tired. I know now. (227)

What enables John and his sister Bonnie to transcend the vague apprehensions and fatalistic attitude of their mother Emma is an understanding of industrial capitalism which she lacked. While Emma, Grandpap, and Ora direct their anger and anxiety toward the mill and wealthy babies, not even toward the owners of the mill and the parents of wealthy babies, Bonnie begins to develop an economic understanding of capitalist exploitation of labor when she stumbles upon a realization of the relationship between surplus-labor and surplus-value. She muses, "I work at my looms and am paid fifty cents for making sixty yards of cloth. And to-day at the store I'm a-going t'pay ten cents a yard for the same cloth. The cloth I make for fifty cents is sold for six dollars" (318). She continues, "They pay themselves for wear and tear on the machines . . . But hit seems I don't get paid for wear and tear on myself" (319).

Although Lumpkin allows some of her characters to form an initial critique of capitalism from their own experiences without the benefit of tutors, she also resists romanticizing the proletariat as necessarily revolutionary, as Page does in *Gathering Storm*. *Gathering Storm* presents all workers as being unified in class allegiance, whether they exhibit residual or emergent values. *To Make My Bread*, however, includes a character who aspires to become middle-class and exploits the labor of his family in order to do so. Emma's son Basil separates himself from his family, when

still a child, by choosing institutions over the family. When his grandfather is arrested for bootlegging, Basil sides with the law because he fears being lumped with his grandfather and places his own reputation above the material concerns of his family. Later, he sells the family farm to fund his own education. Whereas Emma and her other children are led toward class consciousness by their thwarted aspirations for better material conditions, Basil illustrates that one's class origin does not provide immunity from immersion within the hegemony of industrial capitalism nor from exploiting the labor of others, particularly if that exploitation fulfills material aspirations.

Class Consciousness as Perpetual Struggle

Walter B. Rideout proposes that in proletarian novels wherein strikes are defeated, "the reader is assured that the workers have at least been educated, have learned solidarity, and are better prepared for the next battle in the class war" (*The Radical Novel* 178). *Strike!*, *Gathering Storm*, and *To Make My Bread* reflect this pattern, for, though in each of the novels the strike based upon the one at Gastonia is brutally repressed, each also concludes with a statement that the strike has not been in vain, that its failure is only a temporary setback in the movement towards regional, national, and international revolution. When the strikes in Stonerton and Leesville culminate in "a long line of death" (Vorse, *Strike!* 230) of murdered union members, those who survive declare, "we're agoin' to bring solidarity to the whole

South" (235) and "This is just the beginning" (Lumpkin, *To Make My Bread* 384).²⁸

While not all proletarian characters in these novels achieve class consciousness, those who do appear to maintain this consciousness at the conclusion of the novels and, supposedly, beyond. In other words, these novels present class consciousness as a stage of development from which there is no possibility of regression.

Olive Tilford Dargan's *Call Home the Heart* stands out among the Gastonia novels, for it reverses the trend of the others. While the other Gastonia novels depict the failure of the strike but stress the commitment of the workers, *Call Home the Heart* ends before the termination of the strike and instead depicts its protagonist as having failed in her quest to transform herself. In an apparently self-erasing plot, Ishma Waycaster, frustrated with a life of child-bearing and subsistence farming, leaves her husband and her home in the mountains of eastern North Carolina, flees to Winbury, Dargan's fictional counterpart to Gastonia, and becomes involved in union organizing, but ultimately she forsakes the union and returns to her husband.

Although Dargan read the *Daily Worker* regularly and, in 1926, declared herself "vivid red" (Shannon 434, 440),²⁹ the incomplete development of Ishma's

²⁸ *Gathering Storm* ends with the strike leaders jumping bail while awaiting trial for the murder of the chief of police and attending a workers' conference in Cleveland, Ohio. Although there is an uncomfortable suggestion that a few individuals' radicalization is worth more than the material improvements for which union members fought, the novel concludes with Young Marge musing on being "a fore-runner, a marshaller of the gathering storm" (374) of the coming revolution.

²⁹ In addition, she was a close friend of Rose Pastor Stokes, a founder of the American Communist Party. For biographical information on Dargan, see Anna W. Shannon, "Biographical Afterword," *Call Home the Heart: A Novel of the Thirties*, by Fielding Burke [Olive Tilford Dargan], introd. Alice Kessler-Harris and Paul

class consciousness has caused some commentators to question the political disposition of the novel.³⁰ Contemporary reviewers were similarly confused. Writing for the *New Masses*, V. J. Jerome praised Dargan for her depiction of the protagonist Ishma Waycaster's "effort to pass from [the] emerging proletariat to the full-grown militant working class" (14), while the *Saturday Review of Literature's* Jonathan Daniels commended the ending of the novel, which he felt represented a rejection of Marxist propaganda and an "escape from forthright indignation into the truer perspective of the artist" (537). I would argue that *Call Home the Heart* is not the product of an author confused by her own ideological positions but that the novel confronts its protagonist, Ishma Waycaster, with a series of dilemmas, none of which is fully resolved.

Call Home the Heart depicts an incomplete dialectic, for Ishma acquires a revolutionary consciousness without having worked through her prior consciousness. Neither is the revolutionary consciousness complete in itself, since it contains gaps through which Ishma's previous consciousness can surface and regain control. Through an intense analysis of how a single character strives toward class

Lauter (Old Westbury: Feminist P, 1983): 433-46; Anna Shannon Elfenbein, "Introduction," *From My Highest Hill: Carolina Mountain Folks*, by Olive Tilford Dargan, afterword by Jonathan Morrow (Knoxville: U of Tennessee P, 1998): ix-lxv, rpt. of *Highland Annals* (1925); and Jane and Thomas Polsky, "The Two Lives of Olive Tilford Dargan," *The Southern Packet: A Monthly Review of Southern Books and Ideas* June 1948: 1-4.

³⁰ For instance, Candide Ann Lacey contends that "the romantic closure seeks to deny both the early feminist and communist principles which informed the novel" ("Striking Fictions" 381); and Paula Rabinowitz calls the novel's "rhetoric, form and, to some extent, content . . . truly reactionary" ("Female Subjectivity" 18).

consciousness, Dargan avoids a romanticized Marxism³¹ and instead demonstrates the full complexity of the development of class consciousness, which development necessarily includes vacillations between ideologies. The novel ends with one of these vacillations which leads to Ishma's flight from the site of clashing ideologies rather than in a synthesis of them.

The opposing forces struggling for control of Ishma's consciousness have frequently been reduced by critics to "head" and "heart," with "head" representing the reason of Marxism and "heart" the emotional pull of romance. For instance, Sylvia Cook summarizes the opposition in *Call Home the Heart* as being "about the predicament of a woman morally and intellectually committed to communism but drawn by a powerful emotional urge to an idyllic and independent agrarian life . . . of wildness and freedom in the North Carolina mountains, to a beloved husband and a tradition of family service and personal rewards" (102). However, the conflict in *Call Home the Heart* is not as simplistic as an antagonism between a workers' struggle and a pre-industrial existence, for the first paragraph of the novel indicates that Ishma's life in the mountains was anything but idyllic and independent:

Before she was seven, Ishma, the youngest child of Marshall and Laviny Waycaster, had joined the class of burden-bearers. By the time she was thirteen there was little rest for her except on Sunday. That day she kept for herself on the hill-tops. . . Six days of the week

³¹ Myra Page, however, considered *Call Home the Heart* "romanticized." See Christina Looper Baker, *In a Generous Spirit: A First-Person Biography of Myra Page* (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1996) 111 .

Ishma was merely a family possession, giving herself so effectually that no one suspected she was giving; so entirely that she did not suspect it herself. But channels of being that open so readily outward must, more than those whose gates are tight and rusty, protect their reservoir. With no intuitive hint that she had chanced upon a law of salvation, Ishma found a way of replenishing her fount. (1)

Dargan thus sets up an opposition between family and labor, on the one hand, and self and leisure, on the other. For instance, Dargan uses loaded language regarding Ishma's Sunday sojourns into the mountains. On the one hand, her Sabbath repasts amount to a "salvation" (1), but, on the other, they are labeled a "defection" (2) by her mother. From the first pages of the novel, Dargan creates two untenable directions for Ishma to take. On the one hand, in order to "save" herself, Ishma must remove herself from other people; on the other, any attention to her self is a "defection" from family and interpersonal responsibilities and, therefore, unacceptable. As the novel progresses, Ishma struggles to establish control of herself and her circumstances and to escape everything outside of her control which threatens her selfhood. In the early chapters of *Call Home the Heart*, the primary conflict is between Ishma's desire for agency and the realities of coincidence, family, gender ideology, and interdependence, all of which she considers confining and obstacles to her self-determinacy. She refutes her mother's truism that "A gal she must marry, an' a wife she must carry" (20) and resents the unequal distribution of labor within her fatherless household whereby she performs most of the farming, housework, and

childcare for her sister, brother-in-law, and their children. While she saves money to escape her family and journey to Winbury, where she plans to work in the mills, she can control neither accident, the actions of others, nor her own emotions. Thus, she has to spend her saved money on a doctor for her brother-in-law when he is struck by a burning tree, and although she fears being trapped in a desperate existence of childbearing and poverty if she stays in the mountains, she gives in to the marriage proposals of Britt Hensley. Much as she feared, her next several years are spent bearing children, two of whom die of the croup, and enduring one farming mishap after another.

While Ishma does finally escape, by fleeing to Winbury, the agrarianism and domesticity which threatens her individuality, she does so at the price of assuming that she has left all vestiges of her originary culture behind her and of feeling, in order to maintain her new identity, that she has to negate everything which would tie her to that culture. Furthermore, her new identity engages in an abstracted class consciousness which does not account for physical presence. Having always associated entrapment with the mountains and freedom with Winbury, Ishma does not recognize that she has a split consciousness rather than a transformed one. Her Marxist tutor in Winbury, Derry Unthank, unwittingly encourages her formation of a split consciousness, for while he abides by the rhetoric of the Communist Party, he does not necessarily unite that rhetoric with lived experience.³²

³² Significantly, Paula Rabinowitz suggests that Derry Unthank actually acts both as a concealer, rather than revealer, of information important to Ishma and in patriarchal ways similar to those men and that gender ideology Ishma thought she left

This shared split consciousness is most notable in their discussions regarding race and in the shocking climax of *Call Home the Heart*. Derry challenges Ishma to overcome her racism, yet each places undue emphasis on the physical qualities of African Americans. It is apparent that he views African Americans as important allies, but only as functions and tactics to be used in class warfare rather than as full equals. When Ishma begins to use a racial epithet in speaking of Butch Wells, Derry counters by noting that "there are one hundred and twenty-four negroes working in the Whitesville mills, and he got seventy-three of them" (352) to join the union, and then explains to Ishma that black workers could easily replace white workers if they do not unite. At this point, Ishma acknowledges an affection for Butch, but in doing so she stresses his gentility and education as a means of separating him from other African Americans. In contrast, both dwell on Gaffie Wells's body and her relation to the natural world. Derry reveals that she "can't read and write" and says she "looks as if she were about two jumps out of the jungle" (352). Derry then associates Gaffie with "strong earth-currents" (352). When Ishma expresses her fear of miscegenation, Derry says, "I'd like to see a black race keeping its own lines of life, intuitive, *rhythmic with nature*, building its own shelters for burgeoning" (355,

behind. In particular, Unthank conceals methods of and information regarding contraception as if such knowledge would make women independent of men:

Women's reproductive freedom becomes commodified as "the knowledge," which is translated through the male voice. . . . The series of silences about contraception occur exactly at the moments when the female characters begin to ask questions about their sexuality, threatening class solidarity with their men. (*Labor and Desire* 92-93)

emphasis added). His assumption that somehow African Americans are more connected to the natural world than are whites and should remain this way proves that he has not overcome his own racism. Furthermore, his essentialism, in regards to Gaffie's physical nature, demonstrates that the most thoroughly Marxist character in the novel does not possess a single ideology but is a man in whom contrary ideologies compete. Finally, in stressing the otherness of African Americans, Derry leaves himself able to embrace African Americans only as ideas, not as physical beings, as is indicated by his statement, "*I could have hugged Butch when he came in with those names*" (352; emphasis added).

Propelled by Derry's challenge, Ishma rescues Butch Wells when she learns of a plot to lynch him, but if Ishma is able to triumph over her racism during this incident, it is only because Butch has very little physical presence throughout it. He never speaks, as he is unconscious, and when the would-be lynchers place his body in Ishma's car and she looks upon him, noticing that he is bleeding, she becomes "violently nauseated" (380). This is akin to the "uncontrollable revulsion" she later feels when amid Butch's family of "big, black bodies" (383).

Derry's and Ishma's earlier conversation repeats itself in dramatic fashion when Ishma returns Butch to his family. The first thing she hears is Butch's mother, "who wailed with the vigor of her forest ancestry" (381). Verbs usually reserved for animals, such as "swarmed" (382) and "howling" (382), indicate the actions of Butch's family and friends. Gaffie's perspiration is not that of a human but "animal sweat" (385). Ishma obsesses over the smells she encounters and, surrounded by

what she perceives as a dark and foul natural world, she imagines "a high, clean rock on Cloudy Knob, half covered with sweet moss and red-tipped galax" (383).³³ Ishma is physically defeated by her residual disgust for African-Americans when Butch's wife Gaffie hugs her, and she reacts violently, repeatedly punching Gaffie.

Having never considered that she would have to be physically intimate with African Americans in her fight for their equality, she is unprepared for that emotional and physical intimacy. When Ishma has to confront African Americans as physical entities rather than as ideas, then the Marxist ideology in which she has been trained is of no assistance.³⁴ When she has to think of African Americans as physically like herself, of Gaffie Wells as a woman and mother like she is, this is too much for Ishma, and she has to deny the similitude. Her violent outburst reveals a

³³ Barbara Foley contends that "the voice depicting Gaffie speaks with an authority transcending Ishma's limitations" (*Radical Representations* 195), thus, "it would appear that Ishma's feelings of repulsion are ones with which the author identifies, in spite of herself" (195). However, for whatever reason, there is an intimate relationship between what the narrator reports and what Ishma thinks and senses. Just as during the rescue of Butch Wells Ishma pays little attention to Wells so neither does the narrator, in this scene the narrator presents Ishma's irrational sensory perceptions, possibly infected by Derry's own latent racism, without commentary.

³⁴ As Suzanne Sowinska puts it:

. . . without any contact with black working-class men and women, she finds herself unprepared for the severity of her own reactions when face-to-face with them for the first time. [Dargan] represents Ishma . . . as having no context for meeting blacks. They do not work in the mill with her, nor do they often appear in the union circles that Ishma frequents. [Dargan] holds the union leaders responsible for this lack of contact and for a philosophical integration of black and white workers rather than a real one. ("Writing across the Color Line" 130)

failure of her will and the reemergence of a version of herself she had left behind on Cloudy Knob. In her shame at having failed herself, Derry, and the union overall, Ishma debases herself as she had previously debased the Wells family. She labels herself "a beast" (384) and "an animal" (385), and she continues to do so until the end of the novel, when she compares herself to "a panther on Blackspur tearing the midnight with a cry for her mate" (432).

It would seem that *Call Home the Heart* ends with Ishma being thoroughly re-domesticated, having returned to the mountains, her husband, and her surviving son, but as she reclines on a mountainside with Britt, her thoughts drift and she superimposes Derry's face on Britt's and hears his revolutionary words coming out of Britt's mouth, albeit in "a half heard monotone" (432). She can neither ascribe fully to an egalitarian ideology sublimated to economic strategy, nor, though she can remove herself bodily from the mill town, can she deny the class consciousness she has begun to develop. She will always experience conflicting calls to the heart.

Although Dargan may have been critiquing the racial policies of the American left of the 1930s, more important to the structure of *Call Home the Heart* is her presentation of class consciousness. If the process of reaching class consciousness is a matter of synthesizing thesis and antithesis, then a new ideology cannot just be layered upon previously existing experience and ideology without the danger of that previous experience and ideology re-emerging. In Ishma Waycaster's case, she flees one ideology only to be emerged within another and, once her previously existing mountain ideology pokes through her revolutionary one, she seemingly abandons her

adopted ideology to return to her early one. What is crucial to Dargan's presentation of class consciousness is that it is a perpetual struggle prone to setbacks; Dargan here is attempting to deromanticize and deheroize proletarian literature, to avoid "the subjective imposition of the author's wishes onto an objective structure" (199) that James T. Farrell critiqued. If one is to progress on one's way toward class consciousness, then it is necessary to expect such momentary setbacks and the re-emergence of previously held ideologies from time to time. Dargan continues this process in her next novel, *A Stone Came Rolling* (1935), in which Ishma begins to address her previous failings.

By concentrating on a single individual's plight, however, Dargan oversimplifies class struggle. So do Page and Lumpkin by concentrating on single families, albeit across several generations, and as does Vorse, by concentrating upon a single event. Although there is value in each of their approaches, none is comprehensive in its analysis of economic bases and resultant superstructures. *Call Home the Heart* does examine the development of class consciousness within an individual, and *Gathering Storm* and *To Make My Bread* depict the radicalization of select workers over time, but class struggle is an international collective phenomenon. The danger of focusing upon individuals within a novel that promotes radicalism is that radicalism tends to be portrayed as a moral choice rather than as a historical necessity. Likewise, a single strike is not necessarily proletarian because strikes generally have more immediate material goals than the transformation of society. In order to present class struggle and capitalist economics in their full

complexity, it might prove necessary to dispense with the bourgeois structure of the novel in its entirety and to invent a new form of proletarian novel which would not be concerned with individual lives, lineages, or events but which would ask readers to comprehend entire societies and their economic systems instead of identifying with singular protagonists.

Towards a Panoramic Proletarian Novel

In 1916 Sherwood Anderson told Upton Sinclair that he did not feel that writers should act as "socialists, or conservatives or what-not" (qtd. in Townsend 271). His attitude toward the value of politically oriented literature shifted radically in the late 1920s and early 1930s, this shift in politics coming during a period of artistic stagnation.³⁵ Among his other aborted projects, Anderson began a novel in

³⁵ Certain reviewers and commentators have tried to establish a personal history of labor support on the part of Anderson. However, Kim Townsend notes that, while Anderson "dedicated *Marching Men* to 'American Workingmen,'" the novel "expressed nothing but contempt for those who tried to organize them along party lines" (73). Similarly, Daniel Aaron unequivocally states that Anderson's "first book, *Why I Believe in Socialism* (torn up after completion), indicated his early sympathies with the Left" (*Writers on the Left* 194), but Townsend considers it a "dubious claim that [Anderson] had written a long book called *Why I Am a Socialist*--'afterwards fortunately destroyed'" (61). Accounts of Anderson's early commitment to the left may have been encouraged by Anderson himself, for in his contribution to the September 1932 *New Masses* forum "How I Came to Communism: Symposium," he claims:

I myself wrote, when I was a very young man, a long book I called *Why I Believe in Socialism*. Afterward I tore it up. It was very badly written. Among my earlier books I wrote the novel *Marching Men*, an attempt to get at the every day lives of coal miners in a middle western coal mining town. (8)

1927 about "middle-class people in love" (Anderson qtd. in Townsend 254) originally titled *No Love*, then *No God*, then *Sacred Service*, and then, finally, *Beyond Desire*. Anderson did not attempt to have the novel published but renewed work on it in 1929 after he developed an interest in labor activism at Southern mills in Virginia, North Carolina, and Tennessee. He was particularly influenced by a trip he made to the textile mills in Elizabethton, Tennessee, where women workers staged a walkout. Anderson's account of the journey was printed in *Elizabethton* (1929), as well as in an article on the strike for the *Nation*,³⁶ and his perceptions of machines, mills, and millworkers in general made their way into various sketches and poems which would later be collected and published as *Perhaps Women* (1931).³⁷

Despite Anderson's movement toward the left, reviewers were not kind to *Beyond Desire*.³⁸ The critical complaints lobbied against *Beyond Desire* can be

³⁶ See his "Elizabethton, Tennessee," *Nation* May 1, 1929: 526-27.

³⁷ Although he did not become as actively involved as writers such as Dreiser, he began to support the Communist Party, aligned with John Dos Passos and Edmund Wilson in their support of proletarian dictatorship, championed the 1932 Communist Party presidential candidate, and was a delegate to the World Congress Against Imperialist War (Townsend 254-274). During this time, he also contributed pieces to the *New Masses*. See his "A Writer's Notes," *New Masses* Aug. 1932: 10; and "How I Came to Communism: Symposium," *New Masses* Sept. 1932: 6-10. See Townsend 253-86 for a fuller account of Anderson's political activities during the late 1920s and early 1930s.

³⁸ For negative reviews of *Beyond Desire*, see Clifton Fadiman, "Still Groping," rev. of *Beyond Desire*, by Sherwood Anderson, *Nation* 2 Nov. 1932: 432-33; R[einhold] N[iebuhr], rev. of *Beyond Desire*, by Sherwood Anderson, *World Tomorrow* 30 Nov. 1932: 525; and T. K. Whipple, "Sherwood Anderson," rev. of *Beyond Desire*, by Sherwood Anderson, *Saturday Review of Literature* 10 Dec. 1932: 305. Only Granville Hicks praised *Beyond Desire* lavishly although, while doing so, he stressed that Anderson was hardly an ideal proletarian writer. See his "Red

distilled to three main charges: that the purpose of the narrative is not apparent, that the novel is not truly proletarian, and that there is too much attention paid to characters' sexualities. In essence, these complaints are all facets of the same concern--that Anderson was paying lip service to the left but had not transformed his artistry to be consistent with his avowed change in politics. According to some commentators, too much attention paid to sexuality detracts from an examination and explication of political and economic realities, thus reducing the degree to which *Beyond Desire* is proletarian, and if the novel is not proletarian in its orientation, then what is Anderson's purpose in recounting the events of the Gastonia strike?

The content and structure of *Beyond Desire* certainly contribute to critics' confusion, but there has also been an assumption that Anderson intended the novel to be proletarian in the same sense as *Gathering Storm*, *To Make My Bread*, and *Call Home the Heart*. While those three novels chart the development in labor activism and class consciousness among members of the proletariat, Anderson actually devotes minimal space to proletarian characters and does not depict events based upon the Gastonia strike until the fourth and final section of the novel. Instead, the two major characters in the novel are members of the bourgeoisie: Red Oliver, a middle-class boy who, during summers home from college, works in a factory and who engages in labor activism more by accident than as a result of an interrogation of capitalist economics; and Ethel Long, a woman who becomes disenchanted with Southern

Pilgrimage," rev. of *Beyond Desire*, by Sherwood Anderson, *New Republic* 2 Nov. 1932: 168-69.

womanhood and society but whose rebellion is limited to sexual experimentation and who holds no explicit relation to the labor struggles in the novel.

Rather than depicting the radicalization of any particular character or class of characters, Anderson uses *Beyond Desire* to examine the effects of industrialization upon Southern class structure and culture as well as upon personal relationships. Reinhold Niebuhr's allegation that the novel "is a better picture of a confused, disintegrating middle-class world than of the new proletarian world which will rise to destroy the confusion" (525) would seem to be accurate, for Anderson suggests that the gulf between classes and the motivations of those classes is such that solidarity between classes may not be possible or, if it is, simple declarations of revolution are not adequate to produce that solidarity.

Anderson makes these points apparent from the opening pages of *Beyond Desire*. The novel begins with Red reading letters from his college friend Neil Bradley, and Neil makes it clear that his version of revolution is bohemian and spiritual rather than economic. Neil identifies his cause as eliminating "the empty feeling . . . that all of us younger men and women with any life in us have . . . now" (3). For Neil, revolution is necessary because of humans' current lack of "romance and, most of all, the romance of feeling, of thinking they were trying to go somewhere" (3-4). No one mentions seizing control of the mode of production. In fact, the closest connection Neil makes between revolution and economics is his willingness to give up his inherited farm to a socialist state, but he never speaks of the proletariat, economic inequality, or the exploitation of labor. Although he calls

himself a communist, Neil's image of revolution excludes all those whom the revolution would supposedly benefit, all those from a lower class than his own, all those for whom the motivation for revolution would be economic and material rather than spiritual. In contrast, the second section of *Beyond Desire*, "Mill Girls," which examines the lives of women workers at the Langdon Cotton Mill, presents only material reasons for union organizing--reduction in wages, exhausting working hours, working conditions which lead to the development of tuberculosis, and poor living conditions.

The first few pages of *Beyond Desire* also set up a second strain which runs throughout the novel: an association of sex with revolution. Neil's letters to Red speak as much of his premarital sexual relationship with a communist school teacher as they do about his increasing radicalism, and he conflates the two when he calls the school teacher "really a revolutionist" (5) because she thinks that "they ought to sleep together, get used to each other" (4) before marriage. This conflation prepares readers for Red's linkage of sex and revolution throughout the novel. After taking a position at the Langdon Cotton Mill, Red becomes entranced with one of the women workers so that "when he went near her a thrill ran through him and he dreamed of her afterwards at night" (52); he muses, "If there was ever labor trouble among the women in that mill she would be a leader" (52). Later, when the librarian Ethel seduces Red, they have sex on the same table where Red reads the volumes of Marx which she orders for him. Red's interest in Marx makes him attractive to her, for her conservative father had lobbied the town for the construction of the library and

her acquisition of Marx's texts is one method of rebelling against him. Finally, although he tenders the appearance of developing class consciousness through reading the *New Masses* Neil sends him and by engaging in labor activism at the end of the novel, Red's reason for doing both is a desire to win the communist Molly Seabright's heart.

More importantly, attitudes toward sexuality are determined by class in *Beyond Desire*, and sex itself becomes a metaphor for the natures of differing economic systems, particularly capitalism. Red has a romantic and spiritual attitude toward sexuality in that he feels that a woman will complete his being, and yet his bourgeois class origin reveals itself when he associates virility with masculinity and expects monogamy from women. After he develops an interest in Molly Seabright, he wonders, "If he once got, fully, his whole being merged with another . . . the birth of a new life . . . something to strengthen him . . . would he be then a man at last?" (307). Earlier, he becomes outraged after he realizes that one moment of passion does not assert his ownership over Ethel Long, thinking, "how could she, after that, dismiss him like that?" (207). Or perhaps his anger is at being commodified, a fate more frequently suffered by women, and thus at the same time emasculated--"in some queer way his manhood had been assaulted" (207)--for his affection has been purchased, perversely enough, through his being supplied with Marx. It is as if Ethel distills for him the nature of capitalism, which he has not been able to comprehend through his study, in one sexual lesson.

However, Ethel herself cannot escape the gender ideology of capitalism and

the South. She believes, at least subconsciously, that sex is a commodity and that either women are owned, and through such reification can consider themselves outside commerce, or that they vend sex, and thus enter the realm of commerce which should be restricted to men. As soon as she tells Red to leave, she recalls overhearing a prostitute once say, upon encountering a client in the street, "Just because I was with him at night, what right has he to speak to me in the daytime and in the public street?" (206). Ethel reflects, "I may be a prostitute myself," even though she was the one purchasing the sexual favor, and then asserts, "I am" (206-07). Her resolution is to marry Tom Riddle, a lawyer who speaks of marriage as if it were a business transaction and who is rumored of having conducted sexual transactions previously, of having produced an illegitimate child, and of buying the silence of the woman's husband.

If Anderson portrays bourgeois sexuality as necessarily commodified, he also depicts the possibility of a freely dispersed proletarian sexuality. Interestingly, Anderson conveys this other sexuality homoerotically, as if he distrusts the possibility that any relation between men and women can be truly equal and not coercive. In a section of "Mill Girls," Doris, a married woman, massages Grace in the same way as she massages her husband, suggesting that she and Grace have a relationship similar to that of husband and wife; that, contrary to Ethel's assumptions, a woman can be physically affectionate toward several people without being a prostitute, especially if that affection is given as a gift and not offered as a commodity or as seen an asset to be acquired; and that physical contact between workers is restorative

instead of exploitative. However, there is still tension here, for Anderson suggests that this version of sexuality is not entirely accepted among workers because Doris "used to go out . . . to Grace at night" (73). He nevertheless does indicate it is an emergent sexuality within the proletariat, one which is not possible within the bourgeoisie.³⁹

In sharp contrast to her experience of this very gentle and nourishing proletarian homoeroticism, Doris views bourgeois heterosexuality only as violent, such as when, after she attends a movie, she "wished some rich wicked man would come and ruin her just once, not for keeps but just once, in such a garden, back of such a house" (83). A further indication that she connects sexual force and the bourgeoisie is that an essential part of Doris's rape fantasy is that she have "swell underwear and were beautiful" (83). Doris's view of bourgeois heterosexuality, however, is not nearly as sado-masochistic as Ethel's, as if Anderson is suggesting that Doris is removed enough from bourgeois ideology that she cannot truly comprehend the nature of its sexuality.⁴⁰

³⁹ While the homoerotic relationship between Doris and Grace is very nourishing, an attempted one between Ethel and her mother-in-law Blanche, which Blanche forces upon Ethel, is presented as vampiric: "It was as though some older, some more sophisticated and evil thing, like another person, had come into her, had come in with the touch of Blanche's hand . . ." (222).

⁴⁰ David S. Kramer has summarized Ethel's obsession with sexual violence: Most graphically, she fantasizes about a man, "Beat me. Beat me. Make me nice. Make me beautiful" (107) and "Pluck her. Bite her. Eat her. Hurt her" (110). On a slightly more articulate level, she thinks, "I guess I want a brute of a man, one who will pay no attention to my whims" (121). (76; page references to *Beyond Desire* in original)

The greatest expression of dominance and submission, both sexual and economic, however, is forwarded by an interesting story which begins the fourth and final section of *Beyond Desire*, one which ties together conflicts in gender and class. When Red is picked up while he is hitchhiking in North Carolina by a traveling salesman, the salesman displays an incredible fluidity of movement among subjects, for he tells a tale of getting a married woman drunk and raping her: " . . . she had tried to put him off but he had got her into a room and had closed the door . . . he had made her come across . . . 'They can't fool with me,' he said . . . and then suddenly he had begun cursing the communists who were leading the strike at Birchfield" (263). The woman and communists are linked in the salesman's mind because they both resist and threaten to overthrow his dominance, and what makes the salesman abruptly shift to his hatred of the communists in his narrative of sexual debasement is that so far they have not submitted, unlike the woman, although the salesman salves his injury by contending that "We'll fix 'em" (263).

There is, then, a master/slave relationship between men and women and between capitalists and the workers, and in each case the master will not willingly yield power. Although Anderson enables certain characters to see into this pattern, he does not grant them power to alter their actions once they arrive at consciousness. The conclusion of *Beyond Desire* might lead one to believe that the novel is a work of naturalism rather than proletarianism because the characters are unable to alter their destinies even after an apparent change of consciousness, and throughout there is a suggestion that economic class, not intellect, determines one's ideology.

However, this distinction between genres hinges upon an assumption that proletarian literature necessarily presents development of class consciousness and engagement in labor activism by characters who then serve as models for the reader. If the purpose of proletarian literature is to encourage class consciousness and modes of action in the reader, then it is not necessary that characters within the narrative reach a similar state of consciousness. While the fictional accounts of the Gastonia strike published by Vorse, Page, Lumpkin, and Dargan all provide characters who at least partially achieve class consciousness and through whom the strike's events are filtered, Anderson's approach is to provide the reader with information unavailable to or not acquirable by the middle class characters who are the primary focus of *Beyond Desire*. The novel is not a primer on how to achieve class consciousness; rather, it is an illustration of how members of the middle class are trapped within an ideology which does not serve them well, either.

Given this partiality of *Beyond Desire* toward the middle class, though--"Mill Girls," the only portion of the novel which is devoted to proletarian characters solely constitutes less than one-tenth of the entire narrative--one can understand various commentators' resistance to considering it a proletarian work. For a Gastonia novel which seeks to provide a panorama of all economic classes, the interaction between them, and the complex motivations of individual members of those classes, it is necessary to turn to William Rollins, Jr.'s *The Shadow Before*.

The Shadow Before is an anomaly among the Gastonia novels, for it is the only one not set in the South. Rollins moves the strike to the New England town of

Fullerton, but despite the shift in location Rollins remains remarkably faithful to the events of the Gastonia strike, especially the shoot-out between strikers and police and the trials of the strike leaders.⁴¹ While Rollins might have felt more comfortable delineating workers from the North, there are certain benefits of displacing the strike. First, if Rollins avoided a direct correlation with the Gastonia strike, he had greater freedom to create and manipulate events without laying himself open to being accused of distorting historical fact. Second, if Rollins assumed that his readers would primarily be Northern, then he could avoid depicting strikers as "other" in the manner that Vorse does in *Strike!* by making them "Northerners" as well. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, setting *The Shadow Before* in a coastal New England town very much like New Bedford allowed Rollins greater heterogeneity of ethnic groups.⁴²

By populating his novel with French-Canadian, Greek, Irish, Italian, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, and Swedish workers, as well as with Irish cops, Jewish mill-owners, and Portuguese scabs, Rollins is able to metaphorize a single strike as an

⁴¹ Laura Hapke, however, argues that the novel "is modeled as much on the 1928 New Bedford textile strike . . . as on the southern one the following year" (176).

⁴² The vast majority of the workers in the Gastonia mills were Anglo-Saxon or Celtic in ethnic background, which enabled the editors of the *Gastonia Daily Gazette* to reduce support for the strike by labelling the Northern leaders of the strike "foreigners" and by raising fears of miscegenation when the Communist Party advocated racial equality. See, for instance, "If Leaders Were Gone," *Gastonia Daily Gazette* 12 Apr. 1929: 1 and 4, wherein strike leaders are accused of having "kindled the fires of hatred and jealousy and of class prejudice in the minds of these people of the Loray mill; they have planted deeply their doctrines of sovietism, racial miscegenation, free love and indiscriminate intermarriage" (4).

international struggle as well as to dismantle the myth of the American Dream by exposing it as a promise to the few that requires an exploitative capitalist system. Rollins internationalizes his novel further by including passages in languages other than English⁴³ and by beginning *The Shadow Before* in Portugal, where villagers observe an ocean liner departing for "America! where men live in houses bigger than churches," and "where poor boys go and become rich as kings" (4).⁴⁴

Unlike the other Gastonia writers, Rollins does not fall into the trap of arguing that economic class and ethnic or national heritage determines one's actions and ideology or that any one individual has a single ideology which determines every course of action. For instance, in one brief passage Rollins notes a number of ideologies competing with one another for control of the Irish policeman Murphy:

There were always two or three cops around. They talked with most of the strikers and were friendly enough; only their faces became a little grim when they listened to Marvin and Keenan and the other outoftowners speak of them as Cossacks and slaves of the bosses. Young Officer Murphy, gangling, goodlooking, resented it even more than the others. "What the hell," he said to the boys, "I ain't against your strike. I might have been a striker myself, only I went on the

⁴³ See, for instance, several large font translations of "Workers of the world unite!" (212) into French, Portuguese, and Polish (213-15), but Rollins includes dialogue and songs in French, German, Polish, Portuguese, and Russian throughout his novel.

⁴⁴ Additionally, Rollins compares Marvin, the strike leader, to the German communist martyrs Kurt Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg (175).

force. What do you think I want to be one of them Cossacks for when I've known you guys all my life? It's just them foreign agitators I don't like. You know damned well they just come over here to make trouble and get a lot of kale for it." When he had to arrest Mrs. da Silva for throwing a stone at a scabtruck just as the Chief drove by, he was red as a beet, for Mrs. da Silva had known him since he was in kneepants. (163)

While Murphy capitulates to the red-baiting rhetoric which associates labor activism with a foreign threat, it is interesting that he defines "foreignness" not by national origin but by whether or not one is a member of the Fullerton community. Thus, the Anglo Marvin and Celtic Keenan are "foreign agitators," but Murphy presents the Portuguese Mrs. da Silva as one of stalwarts of his community. This conception of community and foreignness is quite different from that of mill superintendent Benjamin Franklin Thayer, who traces his lineage to "1637, [when] William Thayer, with his wife, Hannabel (Smith) landed in Salem" (142) and who compares the industriousness of his ancestors to immigrants from "Portugal, Sicily, the African islands, these people [who] lazed away their lives, soft guitars strumming, indolent voices calling across the still blue waters of the Mediterranean and South Atlantic; . . . *and now they're discontented!*" (143; emphasis in original).

If Rollins humanizes police, portraying them as caught between class and community allegiances, professional responsibility, and anti-union propaganda rather than as brutal sadists or mindless tools of the mill owners, he likewise resists

portraying the striking workers as flawless and immune to competing and contrary ideologies. For instance, Micky Bonner, one of the most vocal and determined of the strike participants, is in love with a Portuguese scab, Ramon Vieira, and cannot rein in her emotions once the strike begins. In fact, when she sees a woman striker grab Ramon in an attempt to stop the truck that transports scabs, Micky reacts with jealousy rather than solidarity, screaming at the woman, "*You bitch--*" (247).

Neither does Rollins fully demonize the scab Ramon Vieira but uses him instead to illustrate the hypocrisy of the American Dream which both entices and excludes recent immigrants. He is being groomed by Thayer, one of the few Anglos in the novel, who preaches the gospel of the American Dream and who leads Ramon to believe that "Abraham Lincoln used to work in a factory when he was a kid, and Hoover" (54). At the same time, and in Ramon's presence, Thayer rails against "these foreigners who come over here without nothing, and do nothing, ruining our country" (127). Ramon even incorporates Thayer's racism, evidenced by his exclaiming triumphantly to Micky, "Thayer says I got a lot of sense for a Wop!" (57). Class treachery is not reserved for the proletariat, however; Harry Baumann, the son of the mill owner, joins the strike, although Rollins resists romanticizing his actions by having Marvin distrust Baumann's motivation as arising from thrill-seeking, an attempt to assert his masculinity, or as a means of punishing his father for personal reasons.

Rollins' commitment not to simplify his characters' motivations was frequently noted by reviewers of *The Shadow Before*, foremost among them John Dos

Passos. Dos Passos begins his review by stating his own aesthetic theory:

The business of a novelist is, in my opinion, to create characters first and foremost, and then to set them in the snarl of the human currents of his time, so that there results an accurate permanent record of a phase of history. Everything in a novel that doesn't work towards these aims is superfluous or, at best, innocent day-dreaming. ("The Business of a Novelist" 220)

Dos Passos then praises Rollins not only for his creation of characters, placing the novelist within "the great line of Dostoevsky and Dickens" (220), but also for his ability to render the reader's experience synonymous with that depicted in the novel: "When you've read it you've been through a strike" (220). Dos Passos concludes, "It's no use describing it. 'The Shadow Before' is a first-rate novel; the thing to do is to read it" (220).

Dos Passos's celebration of *The Shadow Before* is particularly informative, for many commentators have compared the novel's techniques to those of Dos Passos's *U.S.A.* Granville Hicks has noted that "Rollins treats the strike in the Dos Passos manner, swinging from episodes about the strikers to episodes about the employers" (*The Great Tradition*, 2nd ed. 313). John M. Reilly claims that "*The Shadow Before* is technically the most interesting of the Gastonia novels and one of the best applications among left authors of John Dos Passos' effort to construct a new structural form for the critique of American society" (512). Finally, Walter Rideout argues that *The Shadow Before* would not have been possible without Dos Passos's

first two volumes of *U.S.A.* (*The Radical Novel* 213).⁴⁵ While Hicks, Reilly, and Rideout consider Rollins's experimental techniques derivative, thereby implying that the product could not be as good as that of the originator of those devices, several reviewers actually thought that Rollins improved upon Dos Passos. Writing for the *New York Times Book Review*, Louis Kronenberg argued, "From the standpoint of drama and readability, I think Rollins has beaten Dos Passos out. From the standpoint of lucidity and pace I know he has" (6), and, in the *Nation*, Florence Codman elucidated that she preferred *The Shadow Before* over Dos Passos's novels because of Rollins's focus and restraint:

Where Dos Passos endeavors to evoke through his characters a world in chaos, Mr. Rollins keeps his figures victims of the local mill trouble in Fullerton. This concentration has its virtues. The hour of the universal conflict does not appear so imminent--the strike does not even affect all of Fullerton--but the narrow focus dramatizes the immediate problem and makes Mr. Rollins's book the most readable of the proletarian novels that come to mind at the moment. (392)

It is this narrow focus that denotes the greatest difference between Rollins and Dos Passos. Dos Passos does not select an individual event, place, or cast of characters and then complicate the narrative through "the noise of history," but uses the noise of history, both public and personal, as the structural framework of *U.S.A.*

⁴⁵ To be fair to Rideout, he does continue his assessment of *The Shadow Before* by noting innovations not indebted to Dos Passos. See *The Radical Novel* 213-14.

In contrast, Rollins's experimentation never draws the reader away from the Fullerton strike; rather, the headlines, onomatopoeic repetitions used to indicate the relentless sound of machines and the monotony of factory labor, passages in languages other than English, songs, and thematic use of capitalization all serve to punctuate what is otherwise a conventional narrative, albeit one far more sophisticated than those forwarded by the other Gastonia novelists.

Although all of the Gastonia novels can be placed roughly within the category of proletarian realism, each distinguishes itself by form and political orientation, thus proving that even if American proletarianism was generically homogenous, it grew out of its practitioners' varied experiences, literary influences, and politics rather than being mandated by a Communist Party which authors attempted to please and appease. However while, as Michael Gold noted, realism is only one possible form for proletarianism, many literary historians have tended to depict proletarianism only as a subset of realism. For whatever reasons, those writers who aligned themselves with the advocates of proletarianism and who also might be considered modernist have tended to be excluded from the proletarian canon, even if they were hailed as prime examples of proletarianism by their contemporaries.

CHAPTER 4

U.S.A.

John Dos Passos inhabits a contested space in the history of American literary proletarianism. Many of the foremost advocates of proletarianism, both within and outside the United States, hailed Dos Passos as the greatest living practitioner of revolutionary literature and the contemporary author most worthy of study and emulation,¹ yet many subsequent commentators have downplayed the radical content of *U.S.A.* by arguing that the trilogy cannot possibly be considered a work of proletarian literature. The displacement of Dos Passos from the vanguard of American proletarian and radical literature on the part of these latter critics has been accomplished largely through two bifurcations. First, Dos Passos is separable from the American proletarian movement due to the obvious modernism of *U.S.A.* Secondly, Dos Passos's politics throughout his literary career consistently placed the concerns of the individual above any collective, although he apparently turned leftward during the late 1920s. More will be said in the second part of this chapter regarding

¹ Those who have lavished praise upon Dos Passos for the revolutionary nature of *U.S.A.* include V. F. Calverton, who, in *The Liberation of American Literature*, granted him "the most significant position in the radical literary movement in America to-day" (463); Granville Hicks, who devoted more attention to Dos Passos than any of his contemporaries in *The Great Tradition* and who still claimed in 1950 that "no one had more influence on the leftward swing of intellectuals in the early '30's" ("The Politics of John Dos Passos" 115); and the Soviet critic R. Miller-Budnitskaya, who bestowed *U.S.A.* with the accolade of being "the most powerful work of contemporary world literature" (qtd. in Deming Brown 86-87).

the latter of these two claims.

Proletarianism and Modernism

Numerous commentators have defined proletarian literature as opposed to and incompatible with modernism. According to this dichotomy, proletarianism takes the form of realism and is political--specifically, communist--whereas modernism is formalistically experimental, seemingly apolitical but ultimately bourgeois in ideology, and, as a result, "decadent."² As Ralph F. Bogardus and Fred Hobson note, "Modernist experimentation, it is assumed, was jettisoned voluntarily by politically born-again writers, or its practice was successfully discredited, impeded, and corrupted by literary 'commissars' like Mike Gold, Joseph Freeman, and Granville Hicks" (2-3). Even Alan Wald, who has revealed the interplay between Marxism and modernism among individual 1930s poets, claims that "the leading party critics, such as Michael Gold in the United States and Georg Lukacs in Europe, identified the experimental techniques of modernism as the literary counterpart of subjectivism and individualism,

² For instance, Leo Gurko claims that "proletarians looked upon the novel as a tool for social reform. . . . [P]reoccupations with fiction as an art form were so much decadent nonsense. Concern with aesthetics as such were empty, frivolous, or irrelevant" (47). For others who have claimed such an opposition between proletarianism and modernism, see Malcolm Cowley, *The Dream of the Golden Mountains* 245-46; James Burkhart Gilbert, *Writers and Partisans* 141; Walter B. Rideout, *The Radical Novel* 228-229; Jack Salzman, "Hoover, Maltz and the Literary Left," *Journal of Human Relations* Fall 1967: 37-50; and Alvin Starr, "Richard Wright and the Communist Party: The James T. Farrell Factor," *CLA Journal* Sept. 1977: 44-47. Oddly, Malcolm Cowley attributes to the editors of *New Masses* an antagonism toward literary experimentation, but he chastises Joseph Freeman for objecting to the politicized and formulaic approach to the arts taken by many members of the John Reed Clubs. See *The Dream of Golden Mountain* 144-46 and 246.

perhaps even an indicator of incipient fascism" (*The Revolutionary Imagination* 13-14).

While this statement may be an accurate reflection of Lukacs's evaluation of modernism,³ American Marxist critics did not reject experimental techniques as counterrevolutionary. Numerous pieces of criticism written by Gold⁴ and Hicks⁵ point out that the two writers valued the literary experimentation of major modernists.⁶

Regardless of the accuracy of the charge that proletarianism as defined by its

³ See "Tendenz oder Parteilichkeit?" *Linkskurve* June 1932: 13-21, rpt. as "Propaganda or Partisanship?" trans. Leonard Mins, *Partisan Review* Apr.-May 1934: 36-46; "On Socialist Realism," *International Literature* 9.4-5 (1938): 88-90; and *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*, trans. John and Necke Mander (London: Merlin, 1962).

⁴ See "American Intellectuals and Communism," *Daily Worker* 1 Dec. 1923: 5; "A Barbaric Poem of New York," rev. of *Manhattan Transfer*, by John Dos Passos, *New Masses* Aug. 1926: 25-26; "Hemingway--the White-collar Poet," rev. of *Men Without Women*, by Ernest Hemingway, *New Masses* Mar. 1928: 21; and "Three Schools of U.S. Writing," *New Masses* Sept. 1928: 12-14.

⁵ See "D. H. Lawrence as Messiah," rev. of *Phoenix: The Posthumous Papers of D. H. Lawrence*, by D. H. Lawrence, *New Masses* 28 Oct. 1936: 358-59; "Eliot in Our Time," rev. of *The Achievement of T.S. Eliot*, by F. O. Matthiessen, *New Masses* 11 Feb. 1936: 23-24; Rev. of *To Have and Have Not*, by Ernest Hemingway, *New Masses* 26 Oct. 1937: 22-23; and Rev. of *Remembrance of Things Past*, by Marcel Proust, *New Masses* 20 Nov. 1934: 21.

⁶ Interestingly enough, one proponent of proletarian literature, Fred R. Miller, faulted the editors of the *New Masses* for turning "their fiction pages over to Names, as they do even now--bourgeois writers at that, or 'fellow-travelers' with vague revolutionary 'sympathies'" ("The New Masses and Who Else," 4). This is the only accusation that I have found that the editors of major magazines on the left during the 1930s of capitulating too much to intellectuals and other non-proletarians. However, a few articles appeared in the pages of the *New Masses* by Philip Rahv and Wallace Phelps, who would later charge the editors of the *New Masses* with leftism during their tenure at *Partisan Review*, which demeaned the worthiness of so-called "bourgeois writers," but denunciations of the two writers followed in subsequent issues of *New Masses*.

most notable advocates is necessarily anti-modernist, evidence of Dos Passos's "joy in style and technique" (Gurko 47) has been used to separate *U.S.A.* from the multitude of American novels which advocate some form of socialism and examine and depict class relations, the effects of industrial capitalism, and labor struggles.⁷ A more sophisticated version of this argument has been forwarded by Thomas Strychaz, who contends that despite Dos Passos's "deliberately homely metaphors" (160) in his own literary criticism, an appreciation and comprehension of *U.S.A.* demands both specialized intellectual knowledges and "a shared, enabling discourse" (161) which "presupposes an elite readership . . . very different from the group of hoboes, boilermakers, and social workers who gather in *Camera Eye*" (160). Furthermore, through reference to essays in which Dos Passos isolates artists and intellectuals as a professional class comparable to that composed of scientists and engineers,⁸ Strychaz configures Dos Passos's relations between autonomy, hegemony, and political action as leading directly toward the academy. According to Strychaz, the academy possesses a shared discourse and has been afforded a refuge from the interferences of capital and ideology not present in any popular readership, for "the United States has no unified audience possessing homogenous reading skills" (160).

Two effects of Strychaz's argument are that *U.S.A.* is removed from the canon

⁷ One of the more egregious examples of such exclusion is Walter B. Rideout's refusal to include any volume of *U.S.A.* among his extensive list of "American Radical Novels" published between 1901 and 1954. See *The Radical Novel in the United States* 292-300.

⁸ Foremost among these essays is "The Writer as Technician." See Hart, *American Writers Congress* 78-82.

of proletarian literature and that mutually exclusive categories of modernism and proletarianism are reiterated.⁹ However, neither proponents of proletarianism nor Dos Passos, at least during the period of *U.S.A.*'s composition, was quick to establish modernism and proletarianism as mutually exclusive categories, or even to locate a text's revolutionary worth within its immediate accessibility to the masses.¹⁰

⁹ In addition to Strychaz, a number of other critics participate implicitly in this same process by establishing keys to understanding *U.S.A.* primarily accessible to scholars only. These "keys" or specific knowledges include biographical details, frequently deemed necessary to comprehend *The Camera Eye*, and the montage theories of Eisenstein and Vertov. See Barbara Foley, "History, Fiction, and Satirical Form: The Example of Dos Passos's *1919*," *Genre* 12 (1979): 357-78; Barbara Foley, "The Treatment of Time in *The Big Money*: An Examination of Ideology and Literary Form," *Modern Fiction Studies* 26 (1980): 447-67; Melvin Landsberg, *Dos Passos' Path to U.S.A.: A Political Biography, 1912-1936* (Boulder: UP of Colorado, 1972); Charles Marz, "Dos Passos's Newsreels: The Noise of History," *Studies in the Novel* 11 (1979): 194-200; Charles Marz, "U.S.A.: Chronicle and Performance," *Modern Fiction Studies* 26 (1980): 398-415; Robert C. Rosen, *John Dos Passos: Politics and the Writer* (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1981); Carol Shloss, *In Visible Light: Photography and the American Writer: 1840-1940* (New York: Oxford UP, 1987) 143-75; and David L. Vanderwerken, "U.S.A.: Dos Passos and the 'Old Words,'" *Twentieth Century Literature* 23 (1977): 195-228.

¹⁰ Although examples of the institution of a criterion of accessibility, regardless of the text's political bent, can be found among book reviews in the *New Masses*--for instance, Wallace Phelps praises Joyce's *Ulysses* but reserves a full endorsement, for he contends that "these merits have been achieved at the expense of immediate intelligibility to a reader with an average background of experience" ("The Methods" 26)--the journal's literary editor, Granville Hicks, steadfastly refused to equate revolutionary value with mass appeal. See "Proust and the Proletariat," where he declares:

Today, however, I should hesitate to recommend *The Remembrance of Things Past* to a mechanic or a longshoreman or a farmer. Not only does the reading of the work take time that might better be devoted to Marx or Lenin; it requires a kind of preparation that, in our society, workers can seldom have; and it serves a function that is not immediately important for the worker. But for the revolutionary intellectual Proust seems to be required reading. (209)

In the foreword to his translation of Blaise Cendrars's *Panama; or, The Adventures of My Seven Uncles* (1931), Dos Passos does not segregate the work of cubist painters and poets, Soviet futurists, "high" literary modernists such as "Joyce, Gertrude Stein, [and] T.S. Eliot" (134), and classical music composers as constitutively different from one another or from popular manifestations of modernism, including "the windows of Saks Fifth Avenue, skyscraper furniture, the Lenin Memorial in Moscow, the paintings of Diego Rivera in Mexico City and the newritz styles of advertising in American magazines" (134) but links all of the above in a single list that can be opposed to "[l]iterary philosophies vaguely favorable to fascism, pederasty and the snobmysticism of dying religion" (134). Prior to his dismissal of "Humanists, stuffed shirts in editorial chairs, anthology compilers and prize poets, sonnetwriters and readers of bookchats" (134) in this foreword, Dos Passos reveals a politicized evaluation of early twentieth-century avant garde movements whereby "futurism, cubism, vorticism, modernism, most of the best work in the arts in our time" are "comparable with . . . the October revolution in social organization and politics and the Einstein formula in physics" (134). Considering the diverse politics of the artists he mentions--from Marinetti to "Maiakovsky, Meyerhold, Eisenstein" (134)--and the fact that capitalist appropriations of the avant garde would appear to be incompatible with Soviet political formation, one could easily dismiss the reference to the Russian Revolution as merely one more index of "the new."

However, the mention of a scientific development does suggest that Dos Passos views the avant garde and communism as true as well as new, or at least more congruous

with the twentieth century than are "[t]he stuffed shirts" who "rule literary taste" (134). The whole passage celebrates upheaval in the arts, government, and science as a positive value.

Dos Passos dismantles barriers between the avant garde and the proletariat much more clearly in "They Want Ritzy Art" (1928), a defense of the New Playwrights Theatre, of which he was a founding member, against "[t]he critics of the capitalist press" (112), the *Daily Worker*, and "[t]he socialist press [that] said we were communists in sheep's clothing" (112). Dos Passos's list of malcontents already indicates the disintegration of the left into combative factions which would become a central theme of *The Big Money* (1936), but the central antagonists in the essay are critics who insist upon insipid entertainment for American theatregoers and contend "that any play in the writing of which the author had a more serious aim than making money was highbrow or communistic or worse" (113).¹¹ "The main difficulty," Dos Passos notes, in attracting "an ever-widening circle of radicals, workers and plain miscellaneous theatregoers" to experimental and politically charged productions that deal with things that matter to a large and largely workers' audience, is that the whole drift of American cultural life is against it. That tendency is that experiments in thought and presentation are for a few highbrows and that the general public that attends prizefights and

¹¹ Consider the degrees of invective Dos Passos notes among critics of John Howard Lawson's *The International*: "The venerable gentlemen from the capitalist press almost had apoplexy, they foamed and lost their breath thinking up adjectives with which to vent their sour approval and disgust. The radical press was more friendly but hardly less disapproving" (113).

baseball games will take only the most smooth-worn routine in the theatre. (114)

"They Want Ritzy Art" demonstrates that, far from desiring to speak and appeal to an elite audience, Dos Passos and his colleagues among the New Playwrights Theatre sought to unite avant-garde staging with proletarian material for the benefit of a proletarian audience even if, as Dos Passos acknowledges, "it may be that the task is an impossible one" (114). Impossible in America or impossible for any length of time as long as capitalists and reactionary intellectuals have power to thwart the task, that is, because Dos Passos's experiences in Mexico City in early 1927 proved that the avant garde, popular art and audiences, and revolutionary politics could meld to achieve common aims. "Paint the Revolution" (1927) memorializes a group of Mexican "painters [who] started a union, affiliated themselves with the Third International, and set to work" (95) combining European developments with "the methods of the ancient Indian painters" (95) and offering wages and access to materials for "any competent painter" (96) out "of organic necessity" (95) "to justify the ways of Marx to . . . people [who] couldn't read" (95). Although this painters' union was short-lived due to pressures from conservative forces,¹² Dos Passos asserts

¹² According to Dos Passos,

The students of the Preparatoria, sons of hacendados and oilsplattered politicians, objected to this new style of painting, and set about destroying the frescoes. The hammers and sickles over the doors made them uneasy. Intellectuals and newspaper writers, whose ideas of painting was a chic girl drawn a la *Vie Parisienne* with sensually dark smudges under the eyes, kept up a continual hammering under which the Government began to weaken. Vasconceles left the ministry of education. The Union broke up in personal squabbles, largely owing to

that "even if the paintings were rotten it would have been worth while to prove that in our day a popular graphic art was possible" (96).

This last statement, which implies that the political orientation of a work of art and/or the economic class of the artist are more important than the quality of the work, places Dos Passos dangerously close to a partisan aesthetics espoused, at various moments, by radical literary critics and historians such as V. F. Calverton, Michael Gold, Granville Hicks, V. L. Parrington, and Bernard Smith. In fact, glimpses of partisanship appear frequently in Dos Passos's book reviews and essays from the mid-1920s until the mid-1930s.¹³ Dos Passos's apparently acerbic answer to V. F. Calverton's question, "Should [the writer] write what he feels regardless of the party's philosophy?"--"It's his own goddam business" ("Whither the American Writer?

the fact that to continue working under the Laborista government it became necessary to give up the Third International. (96)

Although not as dramatic as the opposition faced by the Mexican painters' union, Dos Passos partially credits the inability of the New Playwrights Theatre to reach its intended audience to the meddling of oppositional critics: "One of these beaux arbiters of New York's taste even stretched professional etiquette to the point of advising people to stay away. Uptown the consensus of opinion was that the whole thing ought to be stopped" ("They Want Ritzy Art" 112).

¹³ Three notable examples are Dos Passos's declaration that "[i]n an ideal state it might be possible for a group to be alive and have no subversive political tendency. At present it is not possible" ("Toward a Revolutionary Theatre" 101); his assertion that "[g]reat literature can only be grown out of the loam of a rich and sprouting popular life. American society is a sausage machine forever turning lively proletarians into bleached and helpless suburban business men" ("The Making of a Writer" 117); and his rather brutal attack upon his friend Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*: ". . . this novel strikes me as being a cock and bull story about a lot of summer tourists getting drunk and making fools of themselves at a picturesque Iberian folk-festival" ("A Lost Generation" 93). One wonders how many literary critics could correctly identify Dos Passos as the author of these isolated quotes, and how many would assume that they were penned by Michael Gold?

11)¹⁴--has been cited frequently as evidence of his resistance to political organizations and ideology influencing or interfering with the artist.¹⁵ At the same time, his longest response to Calverton's questionnaire establishes a native American proletarian canon:

Theodore Dreiser is, and has been for many years, a great American proletarian writer. He has the world picture, the limitations, and the soundness of the average American worker, and expresses them darn well. Sherwood Anderson does too. So did Jack London. We have had a proletarian literature for years, and are about the only country that has. It hasn't been a revolutionary literature, exactly, though it seems to me that Walt Whitman's a hell of a lot more revolutionary than any Russian poet I've ever heard of. (12)

¹⁴ The equally blunt answer "How the hell can he?" in response to the query "Should [the American writer] keep out of [the social crisis that confronts him]?" ("Whither" 11) appears in analyses of Dos Passos not nearly as frequently, nor does Dos Passos's further explanation that "any writer who's not a paid propagandist for the exploiting group (and most of them will be) will naturally find his lot with the producers" (10).

¹⁵ Additionally, Dos Passos's statement that "I don't see how a novelist or historian could be a party member under present conditions" ("Whither" 11) has been cited as proof of his anti-communism, yet in the same questionnaire Dos Passos avers that "Stalin's phrase, 'national in form, proletarian in content,' is damn good, I think" (12). Under what conditions could an anti-communist praise Stalin's assessment of literature? Within the full context of Dos Passos's response to Calverton's questionnaire, it would seem that the first statement above does not indicate fear of manipulation or interference by the Communist Party but that, since that Party is in a state of infancy, especially in the United States ("under present conditions"), it is neither fit to comment upon narrative prose nor should it spend energy that could be devoted to other concerns, hence the continuation of Dos Passos's answer, "the communist party ought to produce some good pamphleteers or poets" (11). If Dos Passos were anti-communist at this stage of his career (1932), then it is not likely that he would consider it possible for the party to produce anything "good."

Dos Passos's formulation of a proletarian canon, his partisanship, and his steadfast belief that avant garde art and literature can appeal to the masses and facilitate revolutionary movements all place him squarely within the proletarian camp as a critic. However, those commentators who have considered Dos Passos a modernist and have separated him from proletarianism have done so, for the most part, based upon his novels rather than upon the essays he contributed to the *New Masses*. Thus, in order to reinstate Dos Passos among the leading American proletarian writers of the 1930s, it is necessary to examine *U.S.A.*, the trilogy he composed and published during the height of the proletarian era. The structure of the trilogy, its evaluation of American history from 1898-1929, and the emphasis upon the development of class consciousness in the *Camera Eye* all indicate that *U.S.A.* is a proletarian text.

Dialectical History

Despite the widespread if not uniform claim to Dos Passos made by radical literary critics within and outside the United States during the apex of proletarian literature during the late 1920s through the mid 1930s and the positions he shared with those critics, as well as his being a founding member of the New Playwrights Theatre and a member of the executive board of *New Masses* from its first issue in May 1926 until 1934, it is odd that Dos Passos does not figure more prominently in studies of proletarian literature. When he does appear in such studies, he is depicted as a liminal figure who had associations with advocates of proletarian literature but whose artistic

and political visions caused him ultimately to dissociate himself from those advocates. Many commentators make a distinction between those artists and critics who were solidly proletarian, such as Joseph Freeman, Michael Gold, and Granville Hicks, and those who began their careers outside of radical politics, affiliated themselves with radical movements during the 1930s and then dissociated themselves from radical politics by the end of the 1930s.¹⁶ Accordingly, a particular mythology has arisen around John Dos Passos to explain the apparent differences between *U.S.A.* (and perhaps *Manhattan Transfer*) and his other novels. This mythology contends that John Dos Passos began his literary career as a Harvard aesthete who became disgusted by the carnage and pointlessness of World War I, moved toward the left during the mid-1920s due to the execution of Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, which leftward turn was reflected in the first two volumes of *U.S.A.*, and parted ways with the left because of the excesses of the Communist Party, which included the execution of his friend Jose Robles during the Spanish Civil War.

Even though there is some validity to this mythology, commentators have frequently worked backward from *The Big Money*, the final volume of *U.S.A.*, as well as from Dos Passos's post-*U.S.A.* works and political positions, and one can detect an attempt on their part to establish an aesthetic and political consistency throughout Dos Passos's career. Thus, any affiliation between Dos Passos and proletarianism can be

¹⁶ A short list of such meanderers would include, in addition to Dos Passos, Sherwood Anderson, Ernest Hemingway, and Edmund Wilson. However, any number of "solidly proletarian" critics and writers, most notably Granville Hicks, underwent the same transformation from apoliticism to Marxism to conservatism.

disavowed, for the seemingly proletarian elements of *U.S.A.* would be viewed as an aberration influenced by the intellectual zeitgeist of the late 1920s and early 1930s. For instance, Allen Belkind has claimed that "a careful examination of Dos Passos' early and later political views reveals that he has remained faithful to the brand of liberalism that has stressed decentralization and self-government" as well as "rugged individualism" (Introduction xlv). Similarly, those critics who directly contest the trilogy's proletarian status frequently do so by reference to *The Big Money* and specifically to the biography of Thorstein Veblen contained therein. In *On Native Grounds*, Alfred Kazin claims that "[i]t is not Marx's two classes and Marx's optimism that speak in *U.S.A.* at the end; it is Thorstein Veblen" (352). Kazin also notes that Dos Passos's protest, like that of Veblen, "is never a Socialist protest, because that will substitute one collectivity for another" (345). Walter B. Rideout, while acknowledging that Dos Passos's "class analysis undoubtedly owes something to Marx," places special emphasis on *The Big Money*, wherein "the basis of Dos Passos's economic criticism becomes at last almost explicit, for it is in this third, climactic volume that he places the key 'biography,' that of Thorstein Veblen, whom he had read so much" (161).

A flaw in these arguments is that they assume that Dos Passos's late position of 1936, when *The Big Money* was published and when Dos Passos had become outraged by the actions of Stalin as well as those of the Communist Party in the United States, was the same one he held when he began work on *U.S.A.* The biography of Thorstein Veblen in *The Big Money* is cited frequently as evidence of Dos Passos's opposition to

socialism, but the argument that the entire trilogy owes more to Veblen than Marx depends upon an assumption that Dos Passos conceived the entire trilogy before publishing any volume of it. Dos Passos did not, in fact, immerse himself in Veblen until late 1934, after the first two volumes of *U.S.A.* had been published, while he was recovering from rheumatic fever.¹⁷

Furthermore, the structure of *U.S.A.* hinges more upon Marxian historical dialecticism than it does upon any of Veblen's economic theories. Barbara Foley has noted that "though he was never a 'pure proletarian.' . . . Dos Passos subscribed to a class-based analysis of social conflict in *U.S.A.* and developed a narrative method that was profoundly dialectical and materialist" (*Radical Representations* 426). This narrative method shares representational strategies with the collective novel, one of

¹⁷ See Ludington, *John Dos Passos* 330-32. See also Granville Hicks, Rev. of *The Radical Novel in the United States, 1900-1954*, by Walter B. Rideout, *New Leader* 39 (12 Nov. 1956): 23. For a balanced evaluation of *U.S.A.* which accounts for the influence of both Veblen and Marx, see Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front* 173-74. Also see "Whither the American Writer," *Modern Quarterly* 6 (Summer 1932): 11-19, where Dos Passos suggests that his eclectic economic beliefs did not sprout from a single theorist, although Marx was certainly part of the mix: "Somebody's got to have the size to Marxianize the American tradition before you can sell the American worker on the social revolution. Or else Americanize Marx" (11-12).

Additionally, there is textual evidence within *U.S.A.* itself that Dos Passos held Veblen in less regard during the composition of *1919* than during the composition of *The Big Money*. In *1919*, Daughter (Anne Elizabeth Trent) encounters and briefly dates a social worker and scholarship student at Columbia who speaks of Veblen perpetually. This character, Edwin Vinal, is presented as a sterile do-gooder, a patronizing liberal whose name ("venal") implies that he will always be in the pocket of the very forces who have created the conditions that he deplors. Vinal is contrasted to the indulgent and passionate anarchist Webb Cruthers, who encourages Daughter to lend her support to a strike, reads the *Masses*, and exposes Daughter to the joys of non-Anglo peoples, unlike Vinal, who merely wants her to pity them.

Foley's "four modes of proletarian fiction" (*Radical Representations* 398). Whereas the other three "modes" of fiction used frequently by proletarian novelists--fictional autobiography, the bildungsroman, and the social novel--were in existence prior to proletarianism and are not formally proletarian in and of themselves, the collective novel was "primarily the product of 1930s literary radicalism" (398).¹⁸ The collective novel stands alone as necessarily proletarian in form for, as Henri Barbusse has noted, it establishes "a new protagonist, the most imposing of all: the masses" (14). The collective novel also stands apart from those bourgeois and pre-bourgeois novelistic genres that proletarians inherited for formal reasons:

A . . . distinguishing feature of collective novels is their frequent use of experimental devices that break up the narrative and rupture the illusion of seamless transparency. Collectivism entails an exercise in formal modernism: indeed, many collective novels give the impression of having been cinematically conceived. These devices direct attention to the process of textual construction and invite the reader consciously to consider the paradigm the author has chosen for describing and

¹⁸ Although Foley divides proletarian novels into four categories, it should be noted that a proletarian novel can exhibit characteristics of more than one category simultaneously. For instance, *U.S.A.* can be considered an autobiography as it reveals the events which developed the author's political consciousness, but considering that this consciousness is progressive, the trilogy can also be considered a bildungsroman. Given the intense focus upon imperialism and industrialism throughout, *U.S.A.* can also be considered a series of interrelated social problem novels.

explaining the social totality. (Foley 401)¹⁹

In the case of *U.S.A.*, the "social totality" is a history of the United States from 1898-1929. Dos Passos utilizes four devices by which to convey this history: fifty-two narrative sections devoted to twelve characters, many of whom also appear in each other's narrative sections; twenty-six biographical prose poems about particularly significant American personalities; sixty-eight Newsreels that present historical events, as reported by newspapers, and items of popular culture in juxtaposed fragments; and fifty-one autobiographical Camera Eye sections. These formal divisions of *U.S.A.* suggest certain assumptions regarding history and how it may be represented most accurately. The characters represent "types"; the biographical prose poems single out significant Americans for analysis; the Newsreels represent dominant ideology as forwarded by the mass media; and the Camera Eye installments chart the narrator's own political development. Granville Hicks, in *The Great Tradition*, highlights the connection between Dos Passos's techniques and the social vision that he renders. The interwoven and interrupted narratives of the fictional characters in the three volumes of *U.S.A.* serve to illustrate to readers that human beings are all "swept along by the same forces" (289), and the Newsreels, Camera Eye sections, and biographical sketches, respectively, convey "the raw material of history" (290), locate the writer

¹⁹ Foley notes two other features of the collective novel: the reader's attention is directed toward social relations because the collectivity depicted by the author is "a phenomenon greater than--and different from--the sum of the individuals who constitute it" (*Radical Representations* 400); and the novel is inundated with documentary material existing outside the novelistic world for the purpose of interrogating ideology also exterior to the novelistic world.

within that history, and identify important persons who have served as catalysts for historical change.

However, Dos Passos's presentation of American history is more complex than that indicated by Hicks. Whereas a traditional dialectic of history may be concerned with the interrelation of objective and subjective phenomena--that is, how events external to the individual interrelate with the individual's actions, experiences, and ideology--Dos Passos employs a double dialectic in *U.S.A.* Dos Passos not only presents a dialectic of the subjective and objective but also employs a dialectic of the individual and collective.²⁰ Thus, Dos Passos's fourfold narrative structure reveals fourfold relations. The fictional narrative sections are subjective in that they focus upon the actions, experiences, and thoughts of individual characters, but, since these characters represent American "types" and classes, the force of the character narratives is collective rather than individual in scope. As a result, Dos Passos suggests that groups of Americans, not specific individuals, are impacted by historical phenomena. The biographical poems are objective²¹ in that they present indisputable

²⁰ By "objective," I do not mean unbiased: the biographical sketches clearly indicate the narrator's attitudes toward his subjects, and the Newsreels are doubly biased--their constitutive materials forward a patriotic and severely anti-radical ideology, highlighted all the more through the narrator's elisions and juxtapositions. Furthermore, whom the narrator has selected for biographical treatment and what events, headlines, news stories, and items of popular culture he includes in Newsreels demonstrate partisanship. Rather, "objective" indicates phenomena with which characters and the narrator have little direct contact and become aware of through other sources.

²¹ Daniel Aaron has argued that the biographies "embody a history of American life and institutions," for "[e]ach portrait, although sharply individualized, is meant to stand for something more inclusive than the sitter: a type, a cast of mind, a national

historical facts regarding important American figures of whom most Americans are aware not through individual contact but through second-hand accounts, yet the scope is individualistic. If the narrative sections suggest that members of certain classes are affected similarly by the motion of history, then the biographies suggest that some significant individuals influence the course of history more than others. The Newsreels are objective and collective, for, whereas the fictional characters of *U.S.A.* represent various classes of Americans and the biographical prose poems depict more significant individuals who have influenced the course of history in some way, the Newsreel sections, which are "made up of snatches from tabloid headlines, popular song lyrics, weather reports, financial predictions, and ephemeral scandals" (Aaron, "*U.S.A.*" 67), indicate dominant and media-generated ideologies at particular moments of time. Finally, the Camera Eye is subjective and individual. If Dos Passos agrees that some individuals have a larger impact upon history than others, he strengthens his position that it is the historian who determines history through these autobiographical snippets. The Camera Eye suggests that history is not an object to be studied separate from the self but is the interplay between the individual, "significant" or not, and those forces which lie outside the individual. These sections present Dos Passos's own personal history of coming to terms with the ideology hurled at him via popular

characteristic," and "[e]ach reflects some aspect of the historical process" ("*U.S.A.*" 67). In this sense, the biographies could be considered objective and collective, yet I would assert the primacy or starting point of individuality, for the figures memorialized possess a concreteness not afforded to the fictional characters due to readers' at least passing familiarity with the majority of those historical personages.

culture and media (the Newsreels), of evaluating major historical figures through dividing them into heroes and villains (the biographical sketches), and of observing less notable people around him.²² Through this double dialectic, Dos Passos presents history as simultaneously subjective and objective, individual and collective. Although there are indisputable events, the way those events are assessed is a subjective process. Likewise, while there are important individuals who affect the course of history, history is ultimately the history of economic classes, nations, and the entire human race.

These narrative devices can be further isolated according to theme and tone.

The twelve characters to whom narrative sections are devoted may be divided into five groups: the radicals, regardless from which economic class they originate (Fainy "Mac" McCreary, Ben Compton, and Mary French); the potential radical who ends up a victim of history due to his inability to transcend his received ideology (Joe Williams); the upwardly mobile figures who move from poverty to an upper-class existence (Janey Williams, Eleanor Stoddard, and Margo Dowling); the industrialists who exploit the labor of the mass of Americans (J. Ward Moorehouse and Charley Anderson); and the aesthetes, who place personal enjoyment and experience above any other value (Anne Elizabeth Trent, Richard Ellsworth Savage, and Eveline Hutchins).

Although characters can be classified by social and economic motivation, they

²² Daniel Aaron credits this approach to history to Dos Passos's father, who advised his son "to look at history as if one were a participant, not merely through the lenses of other minds" ("*U.S.A.*" 64).

can also be divided into oppositions whereby characters with similar backgrounds and experiences diverge according to the choices they make. For example, Mary French can be opposed to both Daughter and Richard Ellsworth Savage, for, although all three come from privileged backgrounds and attend prestigious New England schools, French becomes radicalized while the other two remain aesthetes. The contrast is particularly strong between French and Daughter, for Daughter experiences only a momentary radicalization when she defends a woman striker against a police officer, but she returns to elite life afterward.

Dos Passos's attention to the divergent decisions made by individuals thrust into the same material circumstances and ideological constructs prevents *U.S.A.* from descending into naturalism; however, since many characters in the trilogy never transcend their given ideologies, it is clear that for Dos Passos free will does not operate in a vacuum. Determinist economic and ideological structures do exist and must be struggled against if the individual is to avoid being "caught in the rip tides of history" (Cowley, "John Dos Passos" 31).²³

²³ Cowley notes that a particular danger of collective novels is that they tend to depict "society [as] stupid and all-powerful and fundamentally evil. Individuals ought to oppose it, but if they do so they are doomed" ("John Dos Passos" 32). Cowley argues that Dos Passos falls into this trap because "the world" of *U.S.A.* "seems so vicious that any compromise with its standards turns a hero into a villain. The only characters he seems to like instinctively are those who know they are beaten, but still grit their teeth and hold on. . . . And the same lesson of dogged, courageous impotence is pointed by the Camera Eye . . ." (33). Later, I will argue that the Camera Eye actually forwards the same "will to struggle ahead, the comradeship in struggle, the new consciousness of new men and new forces continually rising" (34) that Cowley finds lacking in *U.S.A.* However, I would suggest that select character narratives and biographies depict struggles against structures of determinism and, in fact, other biographies--those of Bryan, Edison, Insull, and Steinmetz, in particular--

The figures to whom the twenty-six biographical prose poems are devoted can also be divided into categories: Eugene V. Debs, Big Bill Haywood, Robert La Follette, John Reed, Randolph Bourne, Paxton Hibben, Joe Hill, Wesley Everest, Thorstein Veblen can all be considered radical figures, although of very different stripes; Luther Burbank, Thomas Edison, Alfred Steinmetz, the Wright Brothers, and Frank Lloyd Wright are scientific innovators; another large category is comprised of colonialists, industrialists, militarists, and war profiteers--Minor Keith, Andrew Carnegie, Theodore Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson, J. P. Morgan, Frederick Winslow Taylor, Henry Ford, William Randolph Hearst, and Samuel Insull; and Isadora Duncan and Rudolf Valentino are icons of popular culture. A fifth category may be created for three figures that receive prose poems, one per volume, who do not fit into the above categories: William Jennings Bryan, the Unknown Soldier, and Vag. In each case, these figures seem out of place with current situations and represent dilemmas that face the mass of Americans at particular moments in time.²⁴

illustrate the fate of those who do not, or only partially, recognize such structures of determinism.

²⁴ By no means should Bryan be seen as a villain but as a man caught out of time, unaware of the irony of arguing against the teaching of evolution while benefitting from the practical application of science. Furthermore, Dos Passos begins his sketch of Bryan by noting his progressive agrarian politics; apparently, the dilemma for Bryan is his inability to transfer his progressive politics from a homogenous agrarian culture to multicultural industrial and technological culture. To borrow terminology from Raymond Williams, this inability to shift with the motion of history causes Bryan to manifest a residual ideology, via the Scopes Monkey Trial, which serves to facilitate current political control. In this instance, Bryan should not be configured as merely residual, for Dos Passos's biography of Luther Burbank claims that "he was one of the grand old men until the churches / and the congregations / got wind that he was an infidel and believed / in Darwin" (*The 42nd Parallel* 78). Thus Bryan is not a

These categories of historical figures aid Dos Passos's presentation of history as dynamic and simultaneously individual and collective. History is not merely who does what and when, for it is usually an account of power struggles between competing forces and ideologies. Thus, Dos Passos isolates the power struggle between those in economic and political power and those who seek to distribute that power equally among all Americans. While from one perspective those who choose scientific inquiry as their chief pursuit would seem to fall outside of this struggle, Dos Passos notes that scientists cannot control how their discoveries will be applied, nor are they exempt from the backlash of dominant ideologies which their discoveries might threaten. Luther Burbank, the subject of "The Plant Wizard," developed hybrids that greatly increased agricultural production, but the scientific foundation for his experiments ran counter to the prevailing ideology of his time. Therefore, no matter how appreciated the practical applications of his research were, he could still be condemned for the threats that research posed to particular religious dogmas: "He was one of the grand old men until the churches / and the congregations / got wind that he was an infidel and believed / in Darwin" (*The 42nd Parallel* 78). More disturbing is Dos Passos's presentation of Thomas Edison. Among the long list of Edison's inventions, Dos Passos includes "the poured cement house that is to furnish cheap artistic identical sanitary homes for workers in the electrical age" (*The 42nd Parallel* 261), as if to suggest that for Edison all inventions were equal, no matter how

superstitious fool when compared to dominant mass ideology, but he can no longer be considered a revolutionary and in fact facilitates the maintenance of a hegemonic social control he once opposed.

they might affect quality of life or facilitate necessarily exploitative economic systems. Dos Passos reinforces this notion that value-free scientific inquiry frequently strengthens existing power imbalances when he states that Edison "never worried about mathematics or the social system or generalized philosophical concepts" (*The 42nd Parallel* 261), a willful ignorance Dos Passos claims Edison shared with the industrialists Henry Ford and Harvey Firestone. However, according to Dos Passos, even those scientists who have an interest in assisting the formation of an egalitarian society are powerless to control how their discoveries will be used because, ultimately, history is determined by the control of economic systems. Thus, "General Electric humored" (*The 42nd Parallel* 285) Charles Proteus Steinmetz,

and they let him be a socialist and believe that human society could be improved the way you can improve a dynamo and they let him be pro-German and write a letter offering his services to Lenin because mathematicians are so impractical who make up formulas by which you can build powerplants, factories, subway systems, light, heat, air, sunshine but not human relations that affect the stockholders' money and the directors' salaries. (*The 42nd Parallel* 284)

Although the biographies present individuals who have influenced the course of history significantly, no one operates in a vacuum and all individual accomplishments merely feed into already existing social relations.

The Camera Eye and Newsreels are harder to categorize as they appear chronologically throughout the trilogy. Furthermore, given their opposition--the

Camera Eye is subjective and individual whereas the Newsreels are objective and collective--they stand as poles which have to be reconciled through the other two narrative structures employed in *U.S.A.* However, the tone of each of these two devices provide significant keys to how the devices further convey Dos Passos's dialectical understanding of history. One of the more effective ways in which Dos Passos indicates tone is through the use of consistent typographical techniques within each narrative device.²⁵

There are no typographical oddities within the narrative sections treating fictional characters, aside from Dos Passos's penchant for creating new compound words, but even this oddity occurs much less frequently in the conventional narratives than in the other devices. The lack of any distinctive typography is appropriate for the mundane daily existence of many of the fictional characters, and it indicates a lack of awareness on the part of many of those characters of how world events, the media, and popular culture condition their existences.

In contrast, the Newsreels contain a share of distinctive typographical traits, foremost among them the capitalized headlines which often are disconnected from and unrelated to text above and below them. These floating signifiers at one level reflect the visual appearance of newspapers, but they also indicate the hollowness and danger of slogans and sound bites, especially since they appear without explanatory

²⁵ The one exception is that occasionally typographical techniques used in Newsreels appear in the Camera Eye. At one level, this indicates a displacement of the narrator's voice by the voice of mass media and popular culture and their conveyed ideologies, but capitalization within the Camera Eye also indicates a voice of governmental authority.

commentary. The very brevity of these headlines gives them the quality of imperatives from authorial voices; indeed, several of Dos Passos's headlines are commands, such as "TRAITORS BEWARE" in Newsreel 18 (*The 42nd Parallel* 303).

While the other devices are largely, if not exclusively, in prose, the biographies are frequently constructed of verse. As such, the memorialized figures often assume epic scope, whether those figures be heroic, villainous, or foolhardy. Considering that most of the biographies chart major events throughout the individual's life and end in a physical or figurative death²⁶ of the individual in question, the biographies also resemble obituaries and extended epitaphs, and, in fact, within many of the biographies one finds recurring phrases that operate as more concise epitaphs. Although the biographies note important contributions made by individuals, whether for the social good or for personal gain, the omnipresence of death is particularly ominous in the case of the radicals memorialized, for all meet violent or bitter deaths. It is as if Dos Passos were composing an elegy for the members of the left who died and/or were killed before he began work on *U.S.A.*²⁷

²⁶ An example of a figurative death can be found at the end of "Fighting Bob," which concludes with Robert La Follette's failed filibuster against the United States's entering World War I: "They wouldn't let him speak; the galleries glared hatred at him; the senate was a lynching party" (*The 42nd Parallel* 318).

²⁷ If the biographies can be considered elegies, then one may posit a fourfold division of *U.S.A.* by genre: the biographies are elegiac; the Camera Eye sections present diary fragments; the character narratives reflect conventional novelistic form; and the Newsreels mimic newspapers. This generic division could indicate a third dialectic operating within *U.S.A.* which attempts to reconcile public and private forms of writing--certainly, the Camera Eye moves from an alienated, isolated, and private consciousness to a public and political one. However, a proposed dialectic consisting of the public and private is close enough to that consisting of the subjective and

Finally, all of the Camera Eye sections are presented in larger print than are the other sections of *U.S.A.*, which produces the appearance of extra spaces between each word. Unlike the Newsreels, wherein some sort of meaning can be extracted from the headlines, no matter how insufficient or undesirable, the seeming disconnectedness of every word from one another in the Camera Eye sections reveals that any meaning must be achieved through intentional struggle.

Social Autobiography

Barbara Foley claims that "[t]he Camera Eye passages, which document the author's experience from early childhood (1900, when Dos Passos was four) to politically engaged adulthood (1931, when Dos Passos was thirty-five), appear to have little significance to Dos Passos's collectivist project" (*Radical Representations* 432). This would make especially confusing the larger print of the Camera Eye, signifying that it may be more important than the other parts constituting *U.S.A.* Furthermore, if the Camera Eye does not play an major role in Dos Passos's project, there would be little reason for readers to devote the attention required by its cryptic nature. Unlike the biographies and Newsreels, which include events and personages familiar to most contemporary readers, the Camera Eye places great demands upon readers due to its relative lack of identifiable historical events, its highly fragmentary nature, and its discontinuity throughout the trilogy. Foley does contend that the Camera Eye is integral to *U.S.A.* because Dos Passos "can self-critically represent the standpoint

objective that I will not pursue this third possible dialectic in my study.

from which he conceives and narrates the entire trilogy only if he exposes all the forces that have shaped him" (433), but it would seem that the trilogy would be threatened as radical history if the reader were required to devote more intellectual effort to the Camera Eye than the rest of *U.S.A.* I would argue that the Camera Eye serves yet another function. Although, as a novelist, Dos Passos is not required to report the factual and can therefore compose whatever biographies, fictional narratives, and Newsreels he wishes, outside of the world of fiction individuals do not create historically famous or notorious people, less famous people with whom they interact on a daily basis, or, unless they are journalists or editors, the daily news. Thus, what the biographies, fictional narratives, and Newsreels represent are beyond the agency of most individuals. The Camera Eye is the remaining arena left in *U.S.A.* for agency, but this is an agency of a rather limited sort.²⁸ Whereas most autobiographies focus upon the immediate environment, experiences, and actions of the autobiographer, *U.S.A.*, to the degree that it is autobiographical, progresses in a different direction, one in which it becomes necessary to understand de-ideologized history and current national and international events in order to comprehend the exigencies of one's life. Whereas the individual cannot be removed from history--that is, all history is written from a historian's perspective and reflects that historian's ideology--neither can history be removed from the individual, for, if environmental

²⁸ Robert Rosen argues that the Camera Eye presents the only "exercise of . . . will" (86) ripped free from determinism, yet Dos Passos's "halting development into a radical appears as a series of choices, though in the context of the novel as a whole, his own choice ironically seems to be the only possible, the only moral path for a sensitive individual" (86-87).

factors condition who we are, those environmental factors are conditioned by historical processes. The development of the Camera Eye is the development of the narrator's grasping those historical processes with the ultimate purpose of engaging in a struggle against being a victim of history. If the narrator understands the historical processes which account for his present existence, then he can accurately assess means of improving both his own existence and that of all people who are currently exploited. In other words, for Dos Passos selfhood begins as a collision of historical circumstances, and self-determination can only commence once the forces that produced those circumstances are understood.

The early Camera Eye sections present a powerless, scared, and confused Dos Passos who, as a child, records the sensory phenomena associated with the people and environs immediately accessible to him. The moments of fear and confusion may be tangibly associable with political views Dos Passos would later hold, but the early Camera Eye sections depict an animal-like apprehension of the social ills caused by industrial capitalism, such as in Camera Eye 3, a reflection on a childhood train voyage through an industrial section of France:

but you're peeking out of the window into the black rumbling
dark suddenly ranked with squat chimneys and you're scared of the
black smoke and the puffs of flame that flare and fade out of the squat
chimneys Potteries dearie they work there all night Who works
there all night? Workingmen and people like that laborers
travailleurs greasers

you were scared (*The 42nd Parallel* 30)

Nor in these early Camera Eye sections does the narrator have a political consciousness separable from dominant ideology aired by the mass media or, if his expressed ideology does vary from the dominant, that of his parents. Thus, in Camera Eye 6, Dos Passos records the catalyst for his first fist fight--a dispute with another American boy regarding candidates for the 1904 Presidential election--but provides no rationale for his preference of Judge Parker over Theodore Roosevelt.

In those early Camera Eye sections that do depict the narrator as having a political consciousness separable from dominant ideology, this consciousness is expressed as an inability to live up to dominant ideology. Camera Eye 7 provides such an instance of the narrator's inability to live up to the "clean young American Rover Boys" (*The 42nd Parallel* 77) who set themselves in opposition to "bohunk and polak kids" whose "folks work in the mills" (77).

Throughout the early Camera Eye installments, industry is noted according to its rank smell, as if industrial capitalism indicates something rotten and decaying within the fabric of American society and its democratic ideals. In Camera Eye 7, Dos Passos describes the "funny fuzzy smell" of "the pond next the silver company's mills" (77), although, manipulable as they are by dominant ideology, the narrator's "American Rover" friends do not associate industrialists' desire for profits with the apparent pollution of the pond upon which they are skating but, instead, the "dirty" immigrant children who "write dirty words up on walls do dirty things up alleys their folks work in the mills" (77). Considering that Dos Passos himself was the grandson

of an immigrant from Portugal, it is no surprise that though the narrator attends private school²⁹ with these "clean young American Rover Boys" (77), he is uncertain whether he belongs within their community or that of the immigrant millworkers. Or, at least, he "couldn't learn to skate" (77) over the top of such a system that separates Americans into "clean" and "dirty," and his subsequent sympathy for the plight of workers and their children causes him to have "kept falling down" (77) from the position of the elite to their level. As Donald Pizer puts it, the narrator's "ineptness signifies that he is between two worlds" (42).³⁰

Both the association of industrialism with foul smells and racist justification of industrialism continue throughout the early *Camera Eye* installments. For instance, Dos Passos begins *Camera Eye 9* by noting that "all day the fertilizerfactories smelt something awful" (86), and a situation very similar to that depicted in *Camera Eye 7* occurs in *Camera Eye 11*: the narrator recounts being baptized in a Presbyterian church, wondering "would I be struck by lightning eating the bread drinking communion me not believing or baptized or Presbyterian" (100-01) and then his thoughts are penetrated by "masked men riding at night shooting bullets into barns at night what were they after in the oldtime night?" (101) Although no answer is

²⁹ This *Camera Eye* passage is based upon Dos Passos's experiences at Choate.

³⁰ Pizer continues:

Dos Passos' illegitimacy probably strengthened his sense of not belonging to the world he aspired to and hence his ineptness in its skills. (Metaphorically speaking, his father and mother had also done "dirty things up alleys.") He therefore carries with him throughout his upper-middle-class boyhood and early youth a sense of displacement. (43)

provided, a possible one is people very like the narrator--Catholics, non-Anglos, anyone not of the hegemonic power structure represented by the Ku Klux Klan.

Once political agitation enters into the Camera Eye, the racist justification for ignoring the plight of the working class persists. In the first specific act of labor resistance mentioned in the Camera Eye, the Lawrence, Massachusetts, textile strike of 1912, the opposition to the strike is figured on lines of ethnicity rather than class:

when the streetcarmen went out on strike in Lawrence in
sympathy with what the hell they were a lot of wops anyway bohunks
hunkies that didn't wash their necks ate garlic with squalling brats and
fat oily wives the damn dagoes they put up a notice for volunteers good
clean young

to man the streetcars and show the foreign agitators this was still
a white man's (214)

Whereas the early Camera Eye installments are characterized by fear and confusion, by Camera Eye 25, wherein Dos Passos is a student at Harvard, we can begin to see a struggle within the narrator to overcome dominant ideology and the beginnings of his development of a radical political consciousness. From this point forward, the narrator continues his immersion in radical politics. The next Camera Eye installment records an anti-war rally organized by the *Masses* and held in Madison Square Garden. In view of this Camera Eye installment, it would seem inconceivable that one could argue that *U.S.A.* owes more to Veblen than it does to Marx, for, just as the previous Camera Eye installment included the narrator's desire to "say / Marx /

to all" (262), this Camera Eye installment repetitively points to the revolution in Russia. Obviously, at least in terms of how the narrator constructs himself in *U.S.A.*, his radicalism was in evidence long before the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti. Furthermore, contrary to Foley's claims that Dos Passos does not "use the language of class analysis" (*Radical Representations* 426), not only is World War I figured as "the capitalist war" (302), but actual class warfare occurs within the Camera Eye, indicated by the "cops with machineguns" (302).³¹

A particularly interesting element of Camera Eye 26 is the implied critique of middle-class radicals who retire "to the Brevoort" and, eventually, to a comfortable bed. Dos Passos does not reserve his critique of middle-class hypocrisy to radicals, however; Camera Eye 27 notes the inability of the middle- and upper-classes to comprehend the horrors of war. Of two particular Americans who shared vessel with him on the *Espagne's*³² voyage to France, Dos Passos writes the following:

the Roosevelt boys were very brave in stiff visored new
American army caps and sharpshooter medals on the khaki whipcord
and they talked all day about We must come in We must come in
as if the war were a swimming pool (*The 42nd Parallel* 313-14)

Dos Passos continues:

³¹ This Camera Eye installment is based, in part, upon Dos Passos's experiences at an anti-war rally and Greenwich Village party in 1917 where he was almost arrested.

³² Dos Passos sailed to France on the *Chicago* on June 20, 1917 (Aaron and Ludington, "Chronology" 1246).

and the barman was brave and the stewards were brave they'd
all been wounded and they were very glad that they were stewards and
not in the trenches

and the pastry was magnificent

.....

up north they were dying in the mud and the trenches but
business was good in Bordeaux and the winegrowers and the shipping
agents and the munitionsmakers crowded into the Chapon Fin and ate
ortolans and mushrooms and truffles (*The 42nd Parallel* 314)

Bravery here is an abstraction possible only through physical distance so that those exhibiting bravery are not those involved in combat, thus Dos Passos's notation that the former soldiers currently serving as stewards are brave only in stewardship, not on the battlefield.³³ Much more troubling are Dos Passos's constant references to food and libation in this Camera Eye segment, as if for those on the *Espagne*, war is an entertainment, one fed by the blood of those dying, hence the focus upon red wine coming from the blood-soaked earth and rivers and upon the sudden wealth of munitionsmakers who can now afford the most expensive delicacies. The diet of these war profiteers, consisting primarily of birds and fungus, is conspicuous. The eating of

³³ Shortly after having served on the Verdun front, Dos Passos wrote to his friend Rumsey Marvin, "The war is utter damn nonsense--a vast cancer fed by lies and self seeking malignity on the part of those who don't do the fighting . . . none of the poor devils whose mangled dirty bodies I take to the hospital in my ambulance really give a damn about any of the aims of this ridiculous affair" (qtd. in Aaron and Ludington, "Chronology" 1246; original punctuation).

birds indicates that these profiteers gorge themselves by destroying the young and peaceloving, and the feasting upon fungus illustrates that the decay of human civilization actually sustains them. The time of year--autumn--is also pivotal, as if this were a perverse harvesting of human flesh.

Camera Eye 27 is the final Camera Eye of *The 42nd Parallel*, and it serves as a transition to *1919*, the second volume of *U.S.A.*³⁴ Whereas the Camera Eye sections of *The 42nd Parallel* record the narrator's early, confused consciousness and his movement toward a radical understanding of the forces that shape American society, *1919*, with its intense focus upon World War I, reveals the narrator's maturation. Through his own experiences as an ambulance driver during the war, as well as his observation of the brutal suppression of May Day riots in Paris at the conclusion of the war, the narrator comprehends capitalism in its most pernicious form. By the end of *1919*, the narrator determines that capitalism and democracy are incompatible, and he becomes an internationalist because he realizes that control of economic systems and resistance to egalitarian movements also operates internationally.³⁵

Although the majority of *1919* is devoted to World War I, the first Camera

³⁴ Camera Eye 27 is followed by "Fighting Bob," a biography of Robert La Follette that is devoted to his opposition to the United States entering World War I, and the first narrative section devoted to Charley Anderson. This narrative section concludes with Anderson sailing to France to join the war effort.

³⁵ Colonialism is interrogated from the beginning of *U.S.A.*, for *The 42nd Parallel* begins with a Newsreel detailing the events surrounding the Spanish-American War, but the narrator of the Camera Eye is not afforded an opportunity to witness the effects of global capitalism until he serves as an ambulance driver in France during World War I.

Eye section of this volume of *U.S.A.* depicts the death of the narrator's parents. In addition to the conventional mourning one would expect, the narrator refers back to Camera Eye 25, where the narrator recounted his feelings of misspent years at Harvard.³⁶ In the first few lines of Camera Eye 28, the narrator states:

when the telegram came that she was dying (the streetcarwheels
screeched round the bellglass like all the pencils on all the slates in all
the schools) walking around Fresh Pond the smell of puddlewater
willowbuds in the raw wind shrieking streetcarwheels rattling on loose
trucks through the Boston suburbs grief isnt a uniform and go shock
the Booch and drink wine for supper at the Lenox before catching the
Federal (369)

In Camera Eye 25, "the streetcarwheels" might be said to be the motion of history, and the bellglass is certainly a reference to the insularity of Harvard, alternately described in Camera Eye 25 as a "vacuum" (*The 42nd Parallel* 263). In that Camera Eye the narrator also lamented his lack of "nerve to break out of the bellglass" (*The 42nd Parallel* 262) that prevented him from devoting himself to worldly concerns, including radical politics, and he feared that he would "grow cold with culture" (262). The death of the narrator's parents serves to propel the narrator into a new life, for throughout Camera Eye 28 he associates his parents with Harvard, and he proclaims, "tomorrow I hoped would be the first day of the first month of the first year" (370).

³⁶ Dos Passos's mother died May 15, 1915, while he was still attending Harvard. Dos Passos's father died January 27, 1917 (Aaron and Ludington, "Chronology" 1245).

Camera Eye 28 serves a dual purpose for what will follow in *1919*. On the one hand, the death of the narrator's parents initiates the extensive exposure to death that he will encounter as an ambulance driver. On the other, their deaths sever his ties to the United States as well as to the middle-class environment and ideology his parents provided him. This newfound freedom from historical and class-based determination, although achieved at an intense personal cost, will assist him in his evaluation of his war experiences.

The next several Camera Eye installments detail Dos Passos's experiences as an ambulance driver for the Norton-Harjes volunteer ambulance unit during World War I. The most important of these is Camera Eye 30, which plunges the reader into the carnage of World War I and suggests that far from being a war which will preserve democracy, the war in fact runs contrary to the supposedly democratic history and values of the United States:

remembering the grey crooked fingers the thick drip of blood off
the canvas the bubbling when the lungcases try to breathe the muddy
scraps of flesh you put in the ambulance alive and haul out dead

three of us sit in the dry cement fountain of the little garden with
the pink walls in Recicourt

*No there must be some way they taught us Land of the
Free conscience Give me liberty or give me Well they give us
death* (446)

At this point, the narrator struggles because of what he assumes to be the self-evident

nature of democracy as the best of all possible forms of government:

*La Libre Belgique The Junius papers Aeropagitica Milton went
blind for freedom of speech If you hit the words Democracy will
understand even the bankers and the clergymen I you
we must (447)*

The breakdown in grammar in this passage of the Camera Eye reflects not only the apparent collapse of democracy but also the narrator's re-evaluation of democracy. The inversion of the clause "Democracy will understand even the bankers and the clergymen" represents the narrator's inversion of the operation of democracy. As printed, the abstract concept "democracy" is conferred the status of a conscious and active individual, and "democracy" is required to "understand even" those whose desires or ideology run contrary to democratic forms of government. Dos Passos corrects this objectification of democracy by re-establishing people as the collective subjects who create democracy.

If read in isolation, some of the Camera Eye installments devoted to the narrator's experience of the war could be misconstrued as merely anti-war statements absent of any radical economic critique. For this reason, Camera Eye 40 is especially important, for it plunges the reader amid the May Day riots in Paris in 1919. Although World War I is over, there is a focus upon warfare in this Camera Eye, suggesting that the opponents in the "Great War" have merely shifted. Whereas before the opponents were nations, now it is apparent that the combatants are agents of government control and workers:

at the place de la Concorde the Republican Guards in
 christmastree helmets were riding among the crowd whacking the
 Parisians with the flat of their swords scraps of the *International*
 worriedlooking soldiers in their helmets lounging with grounded arms
 all along the Grands Boulevards (1919 699-700)

Particularly significant is the interweaving of *International* throughout the Camera Eye, the lyrics of which appear in the Newsreel which immediately follows. The *International* is counterpoised against the "Republican Guards" and "the gendarmerie nationale" as if the conclusion of World War I and the League of Nations sought only to continue "the deeply divisive national self-interests that were the cause of the war itself" (Pizer 156). Pizer notes that "a possible alternative to self-interest--a revolutionary socialist society, as in Russia--is a possibility" (156).

As the narrator develops a fuller understanding of capitalism, imperialism, and class warfare, the Camera Eye installments virtually disappear in *The Big Money*, the final volume of *U.S.A.* It is as if the narrator is no longer puzzled by his personal experiences, for he has gained enough historical perspective to understand the genesis of the conditions that affect him. Perhaps this has led to an adequate development of the means to resist dominant ideology and alter those conditions, if necessary. Until the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti, that is. Then the final three Camera Eye installments are presented in quick succession, after nearly 200 pages without a Camera Eye. Camera Eye 50 is particularly angry and defeatist, beginning "they have clubbed us off the streets they are stronger they are rich they hire and fire the

politicians the newspaper editors the old judges the small men with reputations the college presidents the wardheelers" (*The Big Money* 1156), and concluding with "we stand defeated America" (1158). From this point on, *U.S.A.* collapses in each of its narrative strategies. The final Newsreel announces the 1929 stock market crash; in the final Camera Eye the Communist Party is unwilling to facilitate resistance and protect activists--"foreigners what can we say to the dead? foreigners what can we say to the jailed?" (1208); the final biography, "Vag," devoted to a nameless vagrant, stresses his hunger while an engorged businessman vomits in an airplane above him.

What can be made of this collapse? Many a critic has argued that *The Big Money* illustrates Dos Passos's frustration with the Communist Party and his movement away from the left. While he may have become frustrated with the Communist Party, however, the party can hardly be blamed for the disparities in wealth and justice depicted at *The Big Money*'s conclusion. Another possibility is that whatever political orientation Dos Passos held prior to writing *U.S.A.*, it could not suitably explain the executions of Sacco and Vanzetti, the stock market crash, and persistent economic inequalities. Yet another possibility is that Dos Passos wanted to show his development only up until those events, particularly as those events were catalysts for *U.S.A.*'s composition. All of these possibilities, however, focus only upon Dos Passos as an individual. If we were to look at him as a proletarian writer, then Dos Passos's personal reasons become less important than what possible effect the work could have upon readers. I would propose two possibilities. First, Dos

Passos chooses to end in crisis because the nation and the world are in crisis. What better place to end if *U.S.A.* is to encourage self-examination, critique of ideological apparati, and perhaps political action on the part of the reader? Second, by focusing on crises and not providing solutions for readers, Dos Passos further encourages the reader actively to become part of history by seeking those solutions rather than accepting the ready-made ones handed down by political and cultural entities, whether conservative or radical.

A special quality of *U.S.A.* is that, in part, it achieves these proletarian aims through modernist techniques. In particular, a modernist form is necessitated by its version of dialectical history, its suggestion that humans are historically and ideologically determined, and its exhortation that comprehension of history and ideological apparati is the means to transcending that determination, for a conventional realist narrative could not possibly reflect the variety of forces acting upon both the individual and collectives. If certain Marxist critics, including Marx himself,³⁷ have posited that realism is the best method for literature to submit social forces to a critique, then rather than dismissing *U.S.A.* as an example of one strain of proletarianism, perhaps the assumptions that led those critics to their positions should be submitted to a critique. In any event, the example of *U.S.A.* directly refutes the claims made by Stanley Aronowitz and Philip Rahv, respectively, that proletarianism

³⁷ Both Barbara Foley and Raymond Williams have suggested that Marx's avowed aesthetics were in conflict with his critique of political economy. See Foley, *Radical Representations* 147-53; and Williams, "The Writer: Commitment and Alignment," *Marxism Today* (June 1980) 23.

was formulaic and that it forwarded a utopianism endorsed by the Communist Party. If select American and Soviet critics ultimately judged *U.S.A.* too innovative and not utopian enough to serve as a good model, or, at best, an incomplete model, of revolutionary literature, then those reservations do not indicate strict parameters for proletarian literature but indicate instead that advocates of proletarianism played a part in the movement's demise due to their own uneasiness with an existing and vibrant literature.

Conclusion

While the novels I have analyzed in this study were published between 1930 and 1936, I would agree with Cary Nelson that one effect of labeling a group of texts, most of which were written and published within a brief time span,¹ "proletarian" is that it can result in an assumption that the decade of the 1930s was an anomaly within the history of American literature and that, with the exception of those in this decade, there are few examples of creative texts which critically examine, resist, and suggest alternatives to capitalism. Since the making of the radical literature of this decade coincided with the Great Depression and the largest American membership in the Communist Party, such a temporal categorization can also lead to assumptions that this radical literature was the product of national economic crises and/or the machinations of the Communist Party, even if some of its most notable practitioners were never members of and were occasionally hostile toward the Communist Party.

I hope that I have shown that a broadly defined proletarian literature existed in the United States previous to the 1930s and that this literature influenced the novelists included in my study. The era of proletarianism *was* an anomaly, although I would establish the beginning of the era at around 1913, when the Paterson Silk

¹ For instance, Barbara Foley restricts the period of American proletarianism to little more than a decade (1929-1941), and Walter B. Rideout limits proletarianism to the 1930s, although this forces him to place Agnes Smedley's *Daughter of Earth* (1929), an obviously proletarian novel, within the vague category "Novels of the Twenties" (*The Radical Novel* 294-95).

Strike Pageant was performed. Although the most famous radical American novel--Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* (1906)--was published several years previously, certain barriers to wide-scale proletarianism existed. Radical American literature prior to this time, with a few notable exceptions, tended to be insular and populist.² The time and capital necessary to produce and publish novels was not available to most workers or labor organizers; nor would publishers be likely to publish proletarian novels unless they could assume a public which would have the interest and means to purchase those novels. Although various radical journals, such as *Comrade* (1901-05), existed prior to the 1910s, they tended to have small readerships. A major journal which could serve as a forum for radical literature in the United States did not exist until the *Masses* (1911-17). In turn, bohemian Greenwich Village of the 1910s presented a site where avant-garde artists, radicalized members of the middle and upper classes, and leaders and members of labor unions could interact and influence one another. This interaction cultivated an interest in creatively rendering the plight of the working class among those who had the time, capital, and influence upon publishers to initiate a radicalization of conventional literary genres. By the 1930s, proletarian novels were published by major houses, and major cultural organs, such as the *Nation* and *New Republic*, discussed proletarianism and Marxist

² Nelson includes Yiddish labor poetry and Alan Calmer ("Early American Labor and Literature") adds German-American literature as early examples of literary radicalism, yet these two genres were limited to specific linguistic communities. Nelson's and Calmer's further examples of IWW songs, union anthems, strike ballads, and funeral elegies all depend upon oral transmission and would seem to share little with later proletarian novels, although it was not uncommon for such oral literatures to be included within those novels.

evaluations of literature quite seriously.

While there was a steady swelling of proletarian literature in the United States from the nineteenth century to its high point in the 1930s, the period since the end of the Great Depression and World War II has witnessed an apparent demise of socialist and communist literature in the United States. A number of factors have contributed to that apparent demise, including the end of the Great Depression and the United States' entry into World War II, increasing governmental opposition to art that espoused positions associated with communism, the rise of critical formalism and the professionalism of literary study, the increasing number of forms of mass culture, and splintering of literature into categories associated with particular interest groups.

For certain authors, Roosevelt's programs stabilized American capitalist democracy so that there was no longer an economic crisis.³ For others, what alternatives existed to trade unionism did not seem acceptable, especially as the West learned more about Stalinism.⁴ Both of these factors played some part in Dos Passos's movement away from the left, but perhaps a more important factor in the demise of American radical literature was the Cold War's cultural influence. Beyond

³ Although a stabilization of the American economy may have caused certain authors to lose interest in politically revolutionary literature, a number of proletarian writers continued to publish novels which advocated class struggle and socialism, if not communism, long after the supposed end of American proletarianism.

⁴ Unfortunately, since Marxism, on a wide scale, did not develop separately from the Communist Party in the United States, there were few examples of non-Stalinist Marxism for American intellectuals to follow. The destruction of the IWW immediately following World War I eliminated the major native American trend in radicalism--that of anarchism and anarcho-syndicalism.

the suppression of the *Masses*, after its editors opposed American entry into World War I, there was little in the way of governmental attention to leftist literature prior to the conclusion of World War II. Opposition to radical politics generally did not include suppression of radical artistic culture, and what governmental intervention did occur tended to be on the grounds of sexual, rather than political, content. This would change, and soon artists no longer operated in a protected sphere, as evidenced by the House Committee on Un-American Activities hearings and subsequent blacklisting of artists. While some of the writers included in this study maintained their radical politics and continued to create radical literature, the ground was not fertile for emergent radical artists, and several prominent figures of the cultural left of the 1930s suffered severely during the height of the Cold War. Most notable among these were V. J. Jerome, who edited *The Communist*, wrote for the *New Masses*, and was imprisoned in 1955, and Meridel Le Sueur, who could not find a publisher for her works and "was also hounded by the FBI, who caused her to lose several jobs during this period" (Booker 177).

However, although certain writers were targeted by various governmental agencies during the late 1940s and the 1950s, some of whom were imprisoned and/or blacklisted, other writers, such as Howard Fast and John Sanford, managed to publish pro-communist novels throughout the Cold War. The rise of formalism, as well as the correspondent professionalism of literary study, might be an even more significant factor in the apparent decline of proletarian literature, for, rather than engaging in a direct disputation with the fomenters and practitioners of the

movement, as had members of the "Trotskyite" left, or in an attempted repression of it, formalism negated the very principles upon which a politically radical literature can be based. Moreover, the shift of literary study from weeklies to universities, their presses, and the journals which they supported, effectively converted literary critics into specialists rather than comprehensive cultural, economic, and political critics. This specialization of literary study was no mere unintended or side effect of formalism, for the New Critic John Crowe Ransom proposed such a professional class of literary critics:

Criticism must become more scientific, or precise and systematic, and this means that it must be developed by the collective and sustained effort of learned persons--which means that its proper seat is in the universities. (329)

Despite the anti-capitalist rhetoric of many of the Agrarians and Fugitives, Ransom's diction is especially telling, for his system of literary analysis would directly replicate capitalist economics, whereby access to literary meaning is "limited" to those "professionals" who are members of the "enterprise" or corporation of literary study:

Rather than occasional criticism by amateurs, I should think the whole enterprise might be seriously taken in hand by professionals. Perhaps I use a distasteful figure, but I have the idea that what we need is a Criticism, Inc., or Criticism, Ltd. (329)

One can see quite readily how such distance between "professional" and "amateur" classes of readers would conflict with a proletarian approach to literature which

asserts that, ultimately, production, consumption, and analysis of literature are most significant among the masses and that literature which appeals to elite audiences is suspect because of its ideological ramifications.

Despite this seeming polar opposition of proletarians and formalists, advocates of proletarianism did participate in a hierarchicalization of literature. Popular genres such as the crime and detective novel, the gangster novel, and science fiction obviously would be excluded from the New Critical project, but they were also largely ignored by critics writing for the major American periodicals of the left during the 1920s and 1930s. Seldom have these genres been examined by subsequent commentators of proletarianism.⁵ The exclusion of the Communist Party member Dashiell Hammett is particularly distressing, as his *Red Harvest* (1929) focuses upon the suppression of the IWW, and many of his novels and earlier *Black Mask* stories call into question any notion of morality separated from economic and political power. In these works, the major difference between law enforcement officials and "criminals," which, at times, would include members of labor unions, is their positions within the current social structure, not the nature of the actions that they commit. Since science fiction only began to reach its current popularity during the

⁵ M. Keith Booker is an exception to this rule. His *The Modern American Novel of the Left: A Research Guide* contains numerous entries for detective, gangster, and, especially, science fiction novels. Although Booker's study focuses upon the entire twentieth century, it should be noted that all of Dashiell Hammett's novels (1929-1934) were published during the height of the proletarian era, and that the origins of the American science fiction novel of the left can be traced back to Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward* (1888). Michael Denning also briefly notes the interconnection between proletarianism and popular genres. See *The Cultural Front* 254-58.

1940s and 1950s, its inclusion within a study of proletarianism confined to the era of the Great Depression is far less crucial, but if one were to look for elements of proletarianism in American literature after the Great Depression, then the novels of such radical science fiction writers as Isaac Asimov, Ursula K. Le Guin, and Marge Piercy certainly should be examined.

Correspondent to the exclusion of popular genres is the tendency to categorize literature by the ethnicity, gender, race, or sexual orientation of the author. Doing so, in essence, suggests that a text can only have one political concern or agenda. Thus, for instance, Harlem Renaissance and Black Arts writers, as well as Richard Wright, tend to be labeled African-American artists, which categorization suggests that the economic and political content of their work is confined to race relations and does not interrogate economic and political systems overall. Such a separation of artists is confusing for, on the one hand, it implies that minorities exist outside of the structure of the dominant economy, whereas class, ethnicity or race, and gender frequently, if not necessarily, intersect and compound one another. On the other hand, such separation runs counter to much of proletarian literature itself: if issues of ethnic, gender, and race relations and ideology in Gold's *Jews Without Money*, the Gastonia novels, and Dos Passos's *U.S.A.*, for instance, were to be considered tangential and excised from the texts, such excision would render each of these texts virtually meaningless because that excision would remove the very historical contingencies that the texts address. For all of these reasons, a search for a continuation of proletarianism after World War II necessitates an examination of all

American literatures rather than of those works which address labor agitation only.

Works Cited

Aaron, Daniel. *Writers on the Left: Episodes in American Literary Communism*.

1961. Introd. Alan Wald. New York: Columbia UP, 1992.

---. "U.S.A." *American Heritage* July/Aug. 1996: 63-72.

---, and Robert Bendiner. *The Strenuous Decade: A Social and Intellectual Record of the 1930s*. Documents in American Civilization. Garden City: Doubleday, 1970.

---, and Townsend Ludington. "Chronology." Dos Passos, *U.S.A.* 1243-60.

Anderson, Sherwood. *Beyond Desire*. 1932. Introd. Walter B. Rideout. New York: Liveright, 1961.

---. "Elizabethton, Tennessee." *Nation* 1 May 1929: 526-27.

---. *Nearer the Grass Roots; and by the Same Author, an Account of a Journey = Elizabethton*. San Francisco: Westgate, 1929.

---. "A Writer's Notes." *New Masses* Aug. 1932: 10.

"Are Artists People?" *New Masses* Jan. 1927: 5-9.

Aronowitz, Stanley. *The Crisis in Historical Materialism: Class, Politics and Culture in Marxist Theory*. New York: Praeger, 1981.

Aronson, Arnold. *The History and Theory of Environmental Scenography*. Theater and Dramatic Studies 3. Ann Arbor: UMI Research P, 1981.

"Author's Field Day: A Symposium on Marxist Criticism." *New Masses* 3 July 1934: 27-32.

Baker, Christina Looper. *In a Generous Spirit: A First-Person Biography of Myra Page*. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1996.

- , and William J. Baker. "Shaking All the Corners of the Sky: The Global Response to the Gastonia Strike of 1929." *Canadian Review of American Studies* 21 (1990): 321-31.
- Beal, Fred E. *Proletarian Journey: New England, Gastonia, Moscow*. 1937. Freeport: Books for Libraries, 1971.
- Belkind, Allen. Introd. Belkind, ed. xix-lxi.
- , ed. *Dos Passos, the Critics, and the Writer's Intention*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1971.
- Blake, Fay M. *The Strike in the American Novel*. Metuchen: Scarecrow, 1972.
- Bloom, James D. *Left Letters: The Cultural Wars of Mike Gold and Joseph Freeman*. New York: Columbia UP, 1992.
- Bogardus, Ralph F., and Fred Hobson, eds. *Literature at the Barricades: The American Writer in the 1930s*. Tuscaloosa: U of Alabama P, 1982.
- Booker, M. Keith. *The Modern American Novel of the Left: A Research Guide*. Westport: Greenwood, 1999.
- Braun, Edward. *Meyerhold: A Revolution in Theatre*. 2nd ed. London: Methuen, 1995.
- Brickell, Hershell. "Gastonia's Tragedy." Rev. of *Strike!*, by Mary Heaton Vorse. *Saturday Review of Literature* 11 Oct. 1930: 198.
- Brooks, Van Wyck. "On Creating a Usable Past." *Dial* 64 (11 Apr. 1918): 337-41. Rpt. in *Van Wyck Brooks: The Early Years*. Rev. ed. Ed. Claire Sprague. Boston: Northeastern UP, 1993. 219-26.

- Browder, Earl. "Communism and Literature." Hart, *American* 66-70.
- Browder, Laura. *Rousing the Nation: Radical Culture in Depression America*.
Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1998.
- Brown, Deming. *Soviet Attitudes toward American Writing*. Princeton: Princeton
UP, 1962.
- Brown, Edward J. *The Proletarian Episode in Russian Literature, 1928-1932*. New
York: Columbia UP, 1953.
- Burke, Fielding [Olive Tilford Dargan]. *Call Home the Heart: A Novel of the
Thirties*. Introd. Alice Kessler-Harris and Paul Lauter. Afterwords Sylvia J.
Cook and Anna W. Shannon. Old Westbury: Feminist, 1983. Rpt. of *Call
Home the Heart*. 1932.
- Burke, Kenneth. "Revolutionary Symbolism in America." Hart, *American* 87-94.
- Calmer, Alan. "Early American Labor and Literature." *International Literature*
Apr. 1934: 119-27. Rpt. in *New Masses* 5 June 1934: 18-20.
- . "The Wobbly in American Literature." *New Masses* 18 Sept. 1934: 21-22. Rpt.
in Hicks, et al. 340-45.
- Calverton, V. F. *The Liberation of American Literature*. New York: Scribner's,
1932.
- Carr, Virginia Spencer. *Dos Passos: A Life*. New York: Doubleday, 1984.
- Central Committee of the CPUSSR. "On the Party's Policy in the Field of
Literature." Trans. C. Vaughan James. Rpt. in James 116-119.
- . "On the Proletcults." *Pravda* 1 Dec. 1920: n. pag. Trans. C. Vaughan James.

Rpt. in James 113-15.

Clark, Katerina. "The 'Quiet' Revolution in Soviet Intellectual Life." *Russia in the Era of NEP: Explorations in Soviet Society and Culture*. Ed. Sheila Fitzpatrick, Alexander Rabinowitch, and Richard Stites. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1991. 210-230.

Codman, Florence. "Dark Cloud." Rev. of *The Shadow Before*, by William Rollins, Jr. *Nation* 4 Apr. 1934: 580.

Coiner, Constance. *Better Red: The Writing and Resistance of Tillie Olsen and Meridel Le Sueur*. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1995.

Cook, Sylvia Jenkins. *From Tobacco Road to Route 66: The Southern Poor White in Fiction*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1976.

Conroy, Jack. "The Worker as Writer." Hart, *American* 83-86.

Cowley, Malcolm. *The Dream of the Golden Mountains*. New York: Viking, 1964.

---. "John Dos Passos: The Poet and the World." Belkind, ed. 22-43.

---. "What the Revolutionary Movement Can Do for a Writer." Hart, *American* 59-65.

Daniels, Jonathan. "Mill Town." Rev. of *Call Home the Heart*, by Fielding Burke [Olive Tilford Dargan]. *Saturday Review of Literature* 20 Feb. 1932: 537.

Dell, Floyd. "Apologies and Explanations." *Liberator* June 1922: 25-26.

Denning, Michael. *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century*. London: Verso, 1996.

Diggins, John Patrick. *The Rise and Fall of the American Left*. New York: Norton,

1992.

"Discussions and Proceedings." Hart, *American* 165-92.

Dos Passos, John. *The Big Money*. 1936. Dos Passos, *U.S.A.* 763-1240.

---. "The Business of a Novelist." Rev. of *The Shadow Before*, by William Rollins, Jr. *New Republic* 4 Apr. 1934: 220. Rpt. in Dos Passos, *The Major Nonfictional Prose* 160-61.

---. *The 42nd Parallel*. 1930. Dos Passos, *U.S.A.* 5-356.

---. "A Lost Generation." Rev. of *The Sun Also Rises*, by Ernest Hemingway. *New Masses* Dec. 1926: 25. Rpt. in Dos Passos, *The Major Nonfictional Prose* 92-93.

---. *The Major Nonfictional Prose*. Ed. Donald Pizer. Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1988.

---. "The Making of a Writer." Rev. of *120 Million*, by Michael Gold. *New Masses* Mar. 1929: 23. Rpt. in Dos Passos, *The Major Nonfictional Prose* 116-117.

---. *1919*. 1932. Dos Passos, *U.S.A.* 357-761.

---. "Paint the Revolution." *New Masses* Mar. 1927: 15. Rpt. in Dos Passos, *The Major Nonfictional Prose* 94-96.

---. "They Want Ritzy Art." *New Masses* June 1928: 8. Rpt. in Dos Passos, *The Major Nonfictional Prose* 112-14.

---. "Toward a Revolutionary Theatre." *New Masses* Dec. 1927: 20. Rpt. in Dos Passos, *The Major Nonfictional Prose* 101-03.

- . Translator's Foreword. *Panama; or, The Adventures of My Seven Uncles*, by Blaise Cendrars. Trans. John Dos Passos. New York: Harper, 1931. vii-ix. Rpt. in Dos Passos, *The Major Nonfictional Prose* 134.
- . "U.S.A." 1938. Dos Passos, *U.S.A.* 1-3.
- . *U.S.A.* 1938. Comp. Daniel Aaron and Townsend Ludington. New York: Library of America, 1996.
- . "The Writer as Technician." Hart, *American* 78-82.
- Draper, Theodore. "Gastonia Revisited." *Social Research* 38.1 (1971): 3-29.
- Dunne, William F. *Gastonia: Citadel of the Class Struggle in the New South*. New York: Workers Library, 1929.
- Eastman, Max. *Love and Revolution: My Journey Through an Epoch*. New York: Random House, 1964.
- . *Writers in Uniform: A Study of Literature and Bureaucratism*. New York: Knopf, 1934.
- Elfenbein, Anna Shannon. Introd. *From My Highest Hill: Carolina Mountain Folks*, by Olive Tilford Dargan. Knoxville: U of Tennessee P, 1998. ix-lxv. Rpt. of *Highland Annals*. 1925.
- Erlich, Victor. *Modernism and Revolution: Russian Literature in Transition*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1994.
- Ermolaev, Herman. *Soviet Literary Theories, 1917-1934*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1963.
- Fadiman, Clifton. "Still Groping." Rev. of *Beyond Desire*, by Sherwood Anderson.

Nation 2 Nov. 1932: 432-33.

Farrell, James T. *A Note on Literary Criticism*. New York: Vanguard, 1936.

Fiedler, Leslie. "The Two Memories: Reflections on Writers and Writing in the Thirties." *Madden* 3-25.

Foley, Barbara. "History, Fiction, and Satirical Form: The Example of Dos Passos' 1919." *Genre* 12 (1979): 357-78.

---. Introd. *Moscow Yankee*. By Myra Page. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1995. vii-xxix.

---. *Radical Representations: Politics and Form in U.S. Proletarian Fiction, 1929-1941*. Durham: Duke UP, 1993.

---. "The Treatment of Time in *The Big Money*: An Examination of Ideology and Literary Form." *Modern Fiction Studies* 26 (1980): 447-67.

Folsom, Michael. "The Book of Poverty." Rev. of *Jews Without Money*, by Michael Gold. *Nation* 28 Feb. 1966: 242-45.

---. "The Education of Michael Gold." *Madden* 222-51.

---. Introd. Folsom, ed. *Mike Gold* 7-20.

---, ed. *Mike Gold: A Literary Anthology*. New York: International, 1972.

Frank, Waldo. "Values of the Revolutionary Writer." Hart, *American* 71-78.

Freeman, Joseph. *An American Testament*. New York: Farrar, 1936.

---. Introd. *Proletarian Literature in the United States: An Anthology*. Ed.

Granville Hicks, et al. New York: International, 1935. 9-28.

---. "The Tradition of American Revolutionary Literature." Hart, *American* 52-58.

- , Joshua Kunitz, and Louis Lozowick, eds. *Voices of October: Art and Literature in Soviet Russia*. New York: Vanguard, 1930.
- Garrison, Dee. Introd. Vorse, *Strike!* vii-xii.
- . *Mary Heaton Vorse: The Life of an American Insurgent*. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1989.
- "The Gastonia Mills." Rev. of *Strike!*, by Mary Heaton Vorse. *New York Times* 11 Nov. 1930: 6.
- Gilbert, James Burkhart. *Writers and Partisans: A History of Literary Radicalism in America*. New York: Wiley, 1968.
- Giles, James R. *The Naturalistic Inner-City Novel in America: Encounters with the Fat Man*. Columbia: U of South Carolina P, 1995.
- Godine, Amy. "Notes Toward a Reappraisal of Depression Literature." *Prospects: An Annual of American Cultural Studies* 5 (1980): 197-239.
- Gold, Michael. "America Needs a Critic." Rev. of *Literature and Revolution*, by Leon Trotsky. *New Masses* Oct. 1926: 7-9. Rpt. in Gold, *Mike Gold* 129-39.
- . "The American Famine." *Liberator* Nov. 1921. Excerpted and rpt. in Gold, *Mike Gold* 86-95.
- . "American Intellectuals and Communism." *Daily Worker* 1 Dec. 1923: 5.
- . "Author's Note." Gold, *Jews Without Money* 9-12.
- . "A Barbaric Poem of New York." Rev. of *Manhattan Transfer*, by John Dos Passos. *New Masses* Aug. 1926: 25-26.

- . "Change the World!" *Daily Worker* 17 Sept. 1935: 5.
- . Editorial. *New Masses* June 1930: 22.
- . "Faster, America, Faster! A Movie in Ten Reels." *New Masses* Nov. 1926: 7-8. Rpt. in Gold, *Mike Gold* 140-47.
- . "In Foggy California." *New Masses* Nov. 1928: 10-12. Rpt. in Gold, *Mike Gold* 162-71.
- . "Freemont Older." *New Masses* 26 Mar. 1935: 19-20.
- . "Go Left, Young Writers!" *New Masses* Jan. 1929: 3-4. Rpt. in Gold, *Mike Gold* 186-89.
- . "Hemingway--the White-collar Poet." Rev. of *Men Without Women*, by Ernest Hemingway. *New Masses* Mar. 1928: 21.
- . *Hoboken Blues; or The Black Rip Van Winkle: A Modern Negro Fantasia on an Old American Theme. The American Caravan: A Yearbook of American Literature*. Ed. Van Wyck Brooks, et al. New York: Literary Guild of America, 1927. 548-626.
- . "A Jewish Childhood in the New York Slums." Gold, *Mike Gold* 292-319.
- . *Jews Without Money*. 1930. Introd. Alfred Kazin. New York: Carroll, 1996.
- . "Love on a Garbage Dump (32nd Attempt at a Short Story)." *New Masses* 4 Dec. 1928: 6-8. Rpt. in Gold, *Mike Gold* 177-85.
- . *Mike Gold: A Literary Anthology*. Ed. Michael Folsom. New York: International, 1972.
- . *The Mike Gold Reader: From the Writings of Michael Gold*. Introd. Samuel

Sillen. New York: International, 1954.

---. "Notes on the Cultural Front." *New Masses* 7 Dec. 1937: 1-5.

---. "Notes of the Month." *New Masses* Sept. 1930: 3-5.

---. "O Californians! O Ladies and Gentlemen!" *Gently, Brother* 1 (Mar. 1924).

Rpt. in Gold, *Mike Gold* 117-25.

---. "The Password to Thought--to Culture." *Liberator* Feb. 1922: 14-18. Rpt. in Gold, *Mike Gold* 100-10.

---. "A Proletarian Novel?" Letter to *New Republic*, 4 June 1930: 74.

---. "Three Schools of U.S. Writing." *New Masses* Sept. 1928: 12-14.

---. "The Second American Renaissance." Gold, *Mike Gold* 243-54.

---. "On Upton Sinclair." *New Masses* Dec. 1929: 23.

---. "Wilder: Prophet of the Genteel Christ." *New Republic* 22 Oct. 1930: 263-64.
Rpt. in Gold, *Mike Gold* 197-202.

---. "Write for Us!" *New Masses* July 1928: 2.

Golin, Steve. *The Fragile Bridge: The Paterson Silk Strike*. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1988.

Granich, Irwin [Michael Gold]. "Towards Proletarian Art." *Liberator* Feb. 1921: 20-24.

Grigsby, Ellen. "The Politics of Protest: Theoretical, Historical, and Literary Perspectives on Labor Conflict in Gaston County, North Carolina." Diss. U of North Carolina, 1986.

Gurko, Leo. "John Dos Passos' *U.S.A.*: A 1930's Spectacular." *Madden* 46-63.

- Haessly, Jo Lynne. "Mill Mother's Lament: Ella May, Working Women's Militancy, and the 1929 Gaston County Strikes." M.A. thesis. U of North Carolina, 1987.
- Hall, H. Lark. *V. L. Parrington: Through the Avenue of Art*. Kent: Kent State UP, 1994.
- Hapke, Laura. *Daughters of the Great Depression: Women, Work, and Fiction in the American 1930s*. Athens: U of Georgia P, 1995.
- Hart, Henry, ed. *American Writers' Congress*. New York: International, 1935.
- . *The Writer in a Changing World*. New York: Equinox Cooperative, 1937.
- Hicks, Granville. "The Crisis in American Criticism." *New Masses* Feb. 1933: 3-5. Rpt. in Hicks, *Granville Hicks* 5-14.
- . "The Critical Principles of V. L. Parrington." *Science & Society* 3 (1939): 443-60.
- . "Eliot in Our Time." Rev. of *The Achievement of T. S. Eliot*, by F. O. Matthiessen. *New Masses* 11 Feb. 1936: 23-24.
- . *Granville Hicks in the New Masses*. Ed. Jack Alan Robbins. Port Washington: Kennikat, 1974.
- . *The Great Tradition: An Interpretation of American Literature since the Civil War*. New York: Macmillan, 1933. 2nd rev. ed., 1935.
- . "D. H. Lawrence as Messiah." Rev. of *Phoenix: The Posthumous Papers of D. H. Lawrence*, by D. H. Lawrence. *New Republic* 28 Oct. 1936: 358-59.
- . "The Politics of John Dos Passos." *Antioch Review* 10 (1950): 85-97. Rpt. in

Belkind, ed. 106-21.

- . "Red Pilgrimage." Rev. of *Beyond Desire*, by Sherwood Anderson. *New Republic* 2 Nov. 1932: 168-69.
- . Rev. of *To Have and Have Not*, by Ernest Hemingway. *New Masses* 26 Oct. 1937: 22-23.
- . Rev. of *The Radical Novel in the United States, 1900-1954*, by Walter B. Rideout. *New Leader* 12 Nov. 1956: 23.
- . Rev. of *Remembrance of Things Past*, by Marcel Proust. *New Masses* 20 Nov. 1934: 21. Rpt. as "Proust and the Proletariat" in Hicks, *Granville Hicks* 206-09.
- . "Revolution and the Novel." *New Masses* 3 Apr. 1934: 29-31; 10 Apr. 1934: 23-25; 17 Apr. 1934: 24-25; 24 Apr. 1934: 23-25; 8 May 1934: 22-24; 15 May 1934: 23-25; 22 May 1934: 23-25. Rpt. in Hicks, *Granville Hicks* 19-66.
- , et al., eds. *Proletarian Literature in the United States: An Anthology*. Introd. Joseph Freeman. New York: International, 1935.
- Hofstadter, Richard. *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life*. New York: Knopf, 1963.
- . *The Progressive Historians: Turner, Beard, Parrington*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1968.
- Homberger, Eric. *American Writers and Radical Politics, 1900-39: Equivocal Commitments*. New York: Macmillan, 1986.

Hood, Robin. "The Loray Mill Strike." M.A. thesis. U of North Carolina, 1932.

"How I Came to Communism: Symposium." *New Masses* Sept. 1932: 6-10.

"If Leaders Were Gone." *Gastonia Daily Gazette* 12 Apr. 1929: 1, 4.

James, C. Vaughan. *Soviet Socialist Realism: Origins and Theory*. New York: St. Martin's, 1973.

Jerome, V. J. "Toward a Proletarian Novel." Rev. of *Call Home the Heart*, by Fielding Burke [Olive Tilford Dargan]. *New Masses* Aug. 1932: 14-15.

Joyner, Charles. "'Up in Old Loray': Folkways of Violence in the Gastonia Strike." *North Carolina Folklore* 12.2 (December 1964): 20-24.

Kazin, Alfred. Introduction. Gold, *Jews Without Money* 1-7.

---. *On Native Grounds: An Interpretation of Modern American Prose Literature*. New York: Harcourt, 1942.

Kirkpatrick, Ken, and Sidney F. Huttner. "Women Writers in the Proletarian Literature Collection, McFarlin Library." *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 8.1 (1989): 143-53.

Klein, Marcus. *Foreigners: The Making of American Literature 1900-40*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1981.

Kovalenko, Georgii. "The Construcivist Stage." *Theatre in Revolution: Russian Avant-Garde Stage Design 1913-1935*. Ed. Nancy Van Norman Baer. New York: Thames and Hudson, 1991. 145-55.

Kramer, David S. "Sherwood Anderson's *Beyond Desire*: Femininity and Masculinity in a Southern Mill Town." *Southern Studies: An Interdisciplinary*

Journal of the South 5.1-2 (1994): 73-79.

Kronenberger, Louis. "A Novel of Industrial Conflict." Rev. of *The Shadow Before*, by William Rollins, Jr. *New York Times Book Review* 3 Mar. 1934: 6.

Lacey, Candida Ann. "Striking Fictions: Women Writers and the Making of a Proletarian Realism." *Women Studies International Forum* 9 (1986): 373-84.

Landsberg, Melvin. *Dos Passos' Path to U.S.A.: A Political Biography 1912-1936*. Boulder: Colorado Associated UP, 1972.

Lenin, V. I. "On Proletarian Culture." Trans. from *Lenin on Art and Literature*. Moscow: Progress, 1970. Rpt. in James 112-13.

Levenberg, Diane. "Three Jewish Writers and the Spirit of the Thirties: Michael Gold, Anzia Yezierska, and Henry Roth." *Book Forum* 6 (1982): 233-44.

Levy, Melvin P. "Michael Gold." Rev. of *Jews Without Money*, by Michael Gold. *New Republic* 26 March 1930: 159-61.

Lewis, Sinclair. "A Novel for Mr. Hoover." Rev. of *Strike!*, by Mary Heaton Vorse. *Nation* 29 Oct. 1930: 474.

Lowell, Esther. Rev. of *Gathering Storm*, by Dorothy Myra Page. *New Masses* May 1933: 29.

Ludington, Townsend. *John Dos Passos: A Twentieth Century Odyssey*. New York: Dutton, 1980.

Lukacs, Georg. *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*. Trans. John and Necke Mander. London: Merlin, 1962.

- . "On Socialist Realism." *International Literature* 9.4-5 (1938): 88-90.
- . "Tendenz oder Parteilichkeit?" *Linksurve* June 1932: 13-21. Rpt. as
 "Propaganda or Partisanship?" Trans. Leonard Mins. *Partisan Review* Apr.-
 May 1934: 36-46.
- Lumpkin, Grace. *To Make My Bread*. 1932. The Radical Novel Reconsidered.
 Introd. Suzanne Sowinska. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1995.
- Madden, David, ed. *Proletarian Writers of the Thirties*. Preface Harry T. Moore.
 Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1968.
- Magil, A. B. "Pity and Terror." *New Masses* Dec. 1932: 16-19.
- . Rev. of *To Make My Bread*, by Grace Lumpkin. *New Masses* Feb. 1933: 20.
- Marz, Charles. "Dos Passos's Newsreels: The Noise of History." *Studies in the
 Novel* 11 (1979): 194-200.
- . "U.S.A.: Chronicle and Performance." *Modern Fiction Studies* 26 (1980): 398-
 415.
- McCurry, Dan, and Carol Ashbaugh. "Gastonia, 1929: Strike at the Loray Mill."
Southern Exposure Winter 1973-74: 185-203.
- McKay, Claude. *A Long Way from Home*. The American Negro: His History and
 Literature. 1937. New York: Arno, 1969.
- Miller, Fred R. "The New Masses and Who Else." *The Blue Pencil* Feb. 1935): 4-
 5.
- Mullen, Bill, and Sherry Lee Linkon, eds. *Radical Revisions: Rereading 1930s
 Culture*. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1996.

- Murphy, James F. *The Proletarian Moment: The Controversy over Leftism in Literature*. Foreword Cary Nelson. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1991.
- Naficy, Azar. "The Literary Wars of Mike Gold: A Study in the Background and Development of Mike Gold's Literary Ideas, 1920-1941." Diss. U of Oklahoma, 1979.
- Neets, J. Q. [Joshua Kunitz]. Rev. of *Jews Without Money*, by Michael Gold. *New Masses* Mar. 1930: 15.
- . "Upton Sinclair and Thornton Wilder." *New Masses* May 1930: 18.
- Nelson, Cary. *Repression and Recovery: Modern American Poetry and the Politics of Cultural Memory*. Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1989.
- N[iebuhr], R[einhold]. Rev. of *Beyond Desire*, by Sherwood Anderson. *World Tomorrow* 30 Nov. 1932: 525.
- North, Joseph, ed. *New Masses: An Anthology of the Rebel Thirties*. New York: International, 1969.
- Page, Dorothy Myra. *Gathering Storm: A Story of the Black Belt*. New York: International, 1932.
- Page, Myra. *Southern Cotton Mills and Labor*. New York: Workers Library, 1929.
- Papa, Lee. "Staging Communities in Early Twentieth-Century American Labor Drama." Diss. U of Tennessee, 1995.
- Papke, Mary E. "An Analysis of Selected American Marxist Criticism, 1920-1941: From Dogma to Dynamic Strategies." *Minnesota Review* 13 (1979): 41-69.
- Parrington, Vernon Louis. *Main Currents in American Thought: An Interpretation of*

- American Literature from the Beginnings to 1920*. 3 vol. New York: Harcourt, 1927-30.
- . "Vernon Parrington's View: Economics and Criticism." Ed. Vernon L. Parrington, Jr. *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 44 (1953): 97-105.
- Peck, David R. *American Marxist Literary Criticism: 1926-1941, A Bibliography*. New York: American Institute for Marxist Studies, 1975.
- Pells, Richard H. *Radical Visions and American Dreams: Culture and Social Thought in the Depression Years*. New York: Harper, 1973.
- Phelps, Wallace [William Phillips]. "The Methods of Joyce." *New Masses* 20 Feb. 1934: 26.
- Pizer, Donald. *Dos Passos' U.S.A.: A Critical Study*. Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1988.
- Pope, Liston. *Millhands and Preachers: A Study of Gastonia*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1942.
- Polsky, Jane, and Thomas Polsky. "The Two Lives of Olive Tilford Dargan." *The Southern Packet: A Monthly Review of Southern Books and Ideas* June 1948: 1-4.
- Pyros, John. *Michael Gold: Dean of American Proletarian Writers*. New York: Dramatikon, 1979.
- Rabinowitz, Paula. "Female Subjectivity in Women's Revolutionary Novels of the 1930s." Diss. U of Michigan, 1986.
- . *Labor and Desire: Women's Revolutionary Fiction in Depression America*.

Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1991.

Rahv, Philip. "Proletarian Literature: A Political Autopsy." *Southern Review* 4 (1939): 616-28. Rpt. in *Essays on Literature and Politics, 1932-1972*, by Philip Rahv.. Ed. Arabel J. Porter and Andrew J. Dvosin. Boston: Houghton, 1978. 293-304.

Ransom, John Crowe. *The World's Body*. New York: Scribner's, 1938.

Reeve, Carl. "The Great Gastonia Textile Strike." *Political Affairs* 63.3 (1984): 37-40.

---. "Gastonia: The Strike, the Frameup, the Heritage." *Political Affairs* 63.4 (1984): 23-31.

Reilly, John M. "Images of Gastonia: A Revolutionary Chapter in American Social Fiction." *Georgia Review* 28 (1974): 498-517.

"Resolution on the Work of *New Masses* for 1931." *New Masses* Sept. 1932: 20-21.

Rev. of *Gathering Storm*, by Dorothy Myra Page. *New Republic* 19 Apr. 1933: 290.

Rideout, Walter B. Introduction. Anderson, *Beyond Desire* vii-xiii.

---. *The Radical Novel in the United States, 1900-1954: Some Interrelations of Literature and Society*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1956.

Robbins, Jack Alan, ed. *Granville Hicks in the New Masses*. Port Washington: Kennikat, 1974.

Rollins, William. Jr. *The Shadow Before*. New York: McBride, 1934.

Rosen, Robert C. *John Dos Passos: Politics and the Writer*. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1981.

- Salmond, John A. *Gastonia 1929: The Story of the Loray Mill Strike*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1995.
- Salzman, Jack. "Hoover, Maltz and the Literary Left." *Journal of Human Relations* Fall 1967: 37-50.
- Salzman, Jack and Barry Wallenstein, eds. *Years of Protest: A Collection of American Writings of the 1930's*. New York: Pegasus, 1967.
- Sarlos, Robert Karoly. *Jig Cook and the Provincetown Players: Theatre in Ferment*. Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1982.
- Schachner, E. A. "Revolutionary Literature in the United States Today." *Windsor Quarterly* 2 (1934): 27-64.
- Seaver, Edwin. "Another Writer's Position." *New Masses* 19 Feb. 1935: 22.
- . "The Proletarian Novel." Hart, *American* 98-103.
- Shannon, Anna W. "Biographical Afterword." Burke, *Call Home the Heart* 433-36.
- Shloss, Carol. *In Visible Light: Photography and the American Writer: 1840-1940*. New York: Oxford UP, 1987.
- Sillen, Samuel, ed. *The Mike Gold Reader: From the Writings of Michael Gold*. New York: International, 1954.
- Slonim, Marc. *Soviet Russian Literature: Writers and Problems, 1917-1977*. 2nd rev. ed. New York: Oxford UP, 1977.
- Smith, Bernard. *Forces in American Criticism: A Study in the History of American Literary Thought*. New York: Harcourt, 1939.
- . "Parrington's 'Main Currents in American Thought.'" *Books that Changed Our*

- Minds*. Ed. Malcolm Cowley and Bernard Smith. New York: Kelmscott, 1938. 177-91.
- Sowinska, Suzanne. Introd. Lumpkin vii-xliii.
- . "Writing across the Color Line: Women Writers and the 'Negro Question' in the Gastonia Novels." Mullen and Linkon 120-43.
- Starr, Alvin. "Richard Wright and the Communist Party: The James T. Farrell Factor." *CLA Journal* Sept. 1977: 44-47.
- Stott, William. *Documentary Expression and Thirties America*. New York: Oxford UP, 1973.
- Struve, Gleb. *Russian Literature under Lenin and Stalin: 1917-1953*. Norman: U of Oklahoma P, 1971.
- Strychacz, Thomas. *Modernism, Mass Culture, and Professionalism*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993.
- Tippett, Tom. *When Southern Labor Stirs*. New York: Jonathan Cape, 1931.
- Townsend, Kim. *Sherwood Anderson*. Boston: Houghton, 1987.
- Tripp, Anne Huber. *The IWW and the Paterson Silk Strike of 1913*. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1987.
- Trotsky, Leon. *Literature and Revolution*. 1925. New York: Russell, 1957.
- Tuerk, Richard. "Jews Without Money as a Work of Art." *Studies in American Jewish Literature* 7 (1988): 67-79.
- . "Michael Gold on Walt Whitman." *Walt Whitman Review* 3.4 (1986): 16-23.
- Twain, Mark. *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. *Mississippi Writings*. New York:

- Library of America, 1982. 617-912.
- Urgo, Joseph R. "Proletarian Literature and Feminism: The Gastonia Novels and Feminist Protest." *Minnesota Review* 24 (1985): 64-84.
- Vanderwerken, David L. "U.S.A.: Dos Passos and the 'Old Words.'" *Twentieth Century Literature* 23 (1977): 195-228.
- Vorse, Mary Heaton. *A Footnote to Folly: Reminiscences of Mary Heaton Vorse*. New York: Farrar, 1935.
- . *Rebel Pen: The Writings of Mary Heaton Vorse*. Ed. Dee Garrison. New York: Monthly Review, 1985.
- . *Strike!* 1930. Introd. Dee Garrison. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1991.
- . *Time and the Town: A Provincetown Chronicle*. 1942. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1991.
- Wagner, Linda W. *Dos Passos: Artist as American*. Austin: U of Texas P, 1979.
- Wald, Alan. *James T. Farrell: The Revolutionary Socialist Years*. New York: New York UP, 1978.
- . *The New York Intellectuals: The Rise and Decline of the Anti-Stalinist Left from the 1930s and the 1980s*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1987.
- . *The Revolutionary Imagination: The Poetry and Politics of John Wheelwright and Sherry Mangan*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1983.
- Watson, Steven. *Strange Bedfellows: The First American Avant-Garde*. New York: Abbeville, 1991.
- Weisbord, Vera Buch. *A Radical Life*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1977.

- "Where We Stand." *International Literature* 4.3 (1934): 80-94.
- Whipple, T. K. "Sherwood Anderson." Rev. of *Beyond Desire*, by Sherwood Anderson. *Saturday Review of Literature* 10 Dec. 1932: 305.
- "Whither the American Writer." *Modern Quarterly* 6.2 (1932): 11-19.
- Whitman, Walt. "Song of Myself." *Leaves of Grass*. A Textual Variorum of the Printed Poems. Vol. 1: Poems, 1855-1856. Ed. Sculley Bradley, et al. New York: New York UP, 1980. 1-83.
- Williams, Raymond. *Marxism and Literature*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1977.
- . "The Writer: Commitment and Alignment." *Marxism Today* June 1980: 23.
- Why Every Worker Should Join the Communist Party*. New York: Workers Library, 1929.
- Wiley, Stephen R. "Songs of the Gastonia Textile Strike of 1929: Models of and for Southern Militancy." *North Carolina Folklore Journal* 30.2 (1982): 87-98.
- Wilson, Edmund. "The Economic Interpretation of Wilder." *New Republic* 26 Nov. 1930: 31-32. Rpt. in Wilson, *Shores* 500-03.
- . "The Literary Class War: I." *New Republic* 4 May 1932: 319-23. Rpt. in Wilson, *Shores* 534-39.
- . "The Literary Class War: II." *New Republic* 11 May 1932: 347-49.
- . "Marxism and Literature." *Atlantic Monthly* Dec. 1937: 741-50. Rpt. in Wilson, *Triple* 266-89.
- . *The Shores of Light: A Literary Chronicle of the Twenties and Thirties*. New York: Farrar, 1952.

---. *The Triple Thinkers: Ten Essays on Literature*. New York: Harcourt, 1938.

Wixson, Douglas. *Worker-Writer in America: Jack Conroy and the Tradition of
Midwestern Literary Radicalism, 1898-1990*. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1994.

VITA

Walter Squire was born in Toledo, Ohio, on November 29, 1966. He attended public schools in Toledo, where he graduated from Thomas A. DeVilbiss High School in 1985. He received his Bachelor of Fine Arts in creative writing from Bowling Green State University in May 1989. Working with poet Elizabeth Dodd, Squire received his Master's degree in English with a concentration in creative writing from Kansas State University in May 1993. In August 1994, he entered the doctorate program in English at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, and was awarded the degree in December 2001.

Squire is currently an instructor at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte.