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Revolutionary Symbolism: Identity and Ideology in Depression-Era Leftist Literature

by

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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation argues for the importance of works of leftist literary criticism, fiction, and poetry in our understanding of the cultural history of American modernism. Despite the scientific Marxist tendencies apparent in the critical debates that were conducted in the *New Masses* and at the 1935 American Writers' Congress, the leftist fiction of the decade reflects a critical Marxist stance, focused on alienation and the possibilities of formulating narrative strategies to overcome the distortions of ideology. Novels deployed a form of Lukácsian ideological critique, I argue, insofar as they engaged the stereotypes of high literary culture, as well as mass and popular culture, with historical materialism. This strategy is apparent in John Steinbeck's California labor novels, Nathanael West's surreal apocalyptic novels, and in Richard Wright's Thirties fiction, as well as in the lesser-known works of Robert Cantwell and Agnes Smedley. These works reveal a lineage of critical Marxism, engaging the dialectic of identity and ideology, a productive tension between subjective and objective forms of knowledge. The dialectic of ideology and identity explores human subjectivity in-itself and for-itself, both as a knowable object of rational inquiry as a radically unknowable experiential process.
The latter prospect dovetailed with the nationalist paradigm of the American self, a figure of autonomous self-fashioning and reinvention that is central to the American novel tradition. While some novels enclose one aspect of the dialectic into the other, explaining away the ideological commitments of characters as symptoms of their psychological pathologies, for instance, as Steinbeck does, or on the other hand, underestimating the real effects of identity, as Wright does at his most ideological, the best works sustained the contradictions between these two discursive modes, "tarrying with the negative," to use the Hegelian phrase. The continued relevance of these works of literary leftism resides in their critical power, confronting and deconstructing the encroaching patterns of mass culture and gesturing beyond our categories of knowledge, not hubristically but warily.
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction 1
Revolutionary Symbolism:
American Depression-Era Leftist Literature

Chapter One 14
Disguised Theology of the Master-Wizard:
Critical and Scientific Marxism in Depression-Era Literary Criticism

Chapter Two 52
Identity and Ideology:
Recovering the Marxism of Depression-Era Proletarian Fiction

Chapter Three 90
"I was not a character in a novel":
Fictionalizing the Self in Agnes Smedley's Daughter of Earth

Chapter Four 119
Standardized:
Literary Leftism, Modernity, and Stereotypes of the Depression

Chapter Five 150
The Artist's Dialectic:
Race Authenticity in the Thirties Novels of Richard Wright

Conclusion 176
The Power of Negative Thinking
Introduction

Revolutionary Symbolism: American Depression-era Leftist Literature

This dissertation addresses the field of American fiction and literary criticism during the years of the Great Depression in America. The political, social, and cultural upheavals that followed the stock market crash of 1929 made the Thirties a complex decade during which leftist intellectuals merged new ideologies with long-existing structures of national identity. The conclusions reached, based on these attempted mergers of ideology and identity, were in turn altered by the national political developments that ensued as the country underwent modernizing reconfigurations of the national infrastructure. While political shifts altered the path of the radical left political movements, the literary culture produced by these movements was altered, even more directly, by the increasing ubiquity of mass culture, a force whose presence altered the strategies and goals of Depression-era literary leftists.

Traditional interpretations of Thirties leftist culture, in critical works by Philip Rahv (1937), Alfred Kazin (1942), Dixon Wecter (1948), Arthur Schlesinger (1949), Irving Howe and Paul Coser (1957), David Madden (1968), and Richard Pells (1973), juxtapose Marxist politics and literary aesthetics as antithetical opposites. This opposition leads to historical models that either dismiss the literary production of Thirties intellectual leftists, or, patronizingly praise them, but only by emphasizing their distance from the organized left, and seeing them instead as unaligned "fellow travellers." These works rely on binarisms such as high modernism/naïve realism, art/propaganda, Stalinist/Trotskyite, totalitarian/democratic, and native/foreign. The works of Walter Rideout (1956) and Daniel Aaron (1961) partially dissent from the conclusions of earlier
critics, but their work retains the thesis that the Communist Party demanded the subordination of art to politics.

A more recent critical field has emerged to challenge the binarisms of the earlier Cold War-era interpretations. These works emphasize the degree to which Thirties leftist culture was not a reaction against modernism, but was rather a movement within it. Instead of reading the decade's leftism as a symptom of foreign influence whose effects were located on the big coastal cities, these scholars interpret the leftism of the Thirties as a diverse, widespread phenomenon, and have provided detailed histories of many of the smaller, regional movements. The shift in critical direction is apparent in the scholarship of Paul Buhle (1987), Cary Nelson (1989), Paula Rabinowitz (1991), James Murphy (1991), James Bloom (1992), Barbara Foley (1993), Alan Wald (1994), Maria Lauret (1994), Rita Barnard (1995), Laura Hapke (1995), Michael Denning (1996), and Caren Irr (1998). These authors' works challenge Philip Rahv's often-repeated assertion that proletarian fiction was the literature of a party disguised as the literature of a class, and find productive connections between the decade's mass culture and its literary leftism.

An important preliminary aspect of the new field of revisionary studies of the Thirties is the deconstruction of the modernist canon: in particular, critics have drawn attention to the self-contradictory and hierarchically elitist aspects of canon formation. In *The Concept of Modernism* (1990), Astradur Eysteinsson traces the history of modernism's diverse significations within the context of literary history. Theorists of postmodernism who draw contrasts between the modern and the postmodern are, in Eysteinsson's description, ignoring modernism's original, historic definition as an oppositional discourse. Nearly all existing definitions of modernism that attempt to
impose closure to the movement and distance ourselves, historically, from it, effectively preclassify texts according to a criteria that is incoherent. Eysteinssson critiques formalistic definitions of modernism that juxtapose it in contrast to realism\(^1\) or as an assemblage of semiotic codes,\(^2\) and reads these attempts, in Barthean fashion, as objectifications of critical desire. Eysteinsssen argues that our view of ourselves as past modernity is in fact symptomatic of our continued entrenchment within it. Modernism began at a moment of historical crisis, originally defining itself as a negation of tradition, only later to itself become institutionalized as a tradition. The fact that we still understand history this way—as a process in which new works supplement and redefine earlier traditions—attests to the degree to which we still think and function within modernist paradigms.\(^3\)

The case for postmodernism as an amnesiac stage within modernism is further developed in Andreas Huyssen's *After the Great Divide*, which sees the possibility for understanding the politicized nature of the pre-1940 avant-garde as undermined by the conformism of more recent decades. Huyssen argues that since its inception, the tradition of high literary modernism has been asserted, in a form of discourse he describes as that of the Great Divide, as a self-constructed movement, repressing the contaminating mass cultural aspects that in part produced it. The continuation of a high modernist literary canon is evidence of the ongoing strength of this discourse of a Great Divide between high and low culture.

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Rita Barnard has more recently argued the specific place of Thirties literary leftism between the opposing poles of high and low culture. This opposition originated in a 1915 essay, "Highbrow and Lowbrow," by Van Wyck Brooks, which defined two discrete cultural spheres with intellectuals poised, ineffectually, in between. Barnard interprets the communist culture of the proletarian literary movement of the early Thirties as the convergence of high and mass culture, and hears, in the John Reed Clubs' slogan "Art is a Class Weapon," an echo of the Soviet avant-garde of the twenties. The threat posed by works of literary leftism that attempted to bridge the Great Divide between art and society led, Barnard argues, to the later critical stigmatization of literary leftism as "midcult." The critical denigration of Thirties literary leftism hardens, in the New Critical theory of the forties and fifties, into the steadfast demarcation between the canonized works of high modernism and the commodified products of mass media. Barnard finds prophetic vision in the poetry of Kenneth Fearing and the novels of Nathanael West, insofar as those authors are able to understand mass culture and modernism as, in Adorno's phrase, "torn halves of an integral freedom to which however they do not add up" (Barnard 9).

The degree to which traditional models of literary value have been replaced is apparent in the fact that what used to be considered the aesthetic Achille's heel of proletarian culture--its reliance on stereotypes--has been more recently reinterpreted as a willingness to critique hegemonic mass culture on its own terms, an implementation of the "revolutionary symbolism" that Kenneth Burke advocated in the early days of the Popular Front movement. Michael Denning has described how the literary leftism of the

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Thirties was able to "mount an opposition from within the commonplace forms of the culture, thereby winning back both tradition and common sense from their articulation to conservativism" (61). This view is reinforced in the work of Caren Irr, who describes how proletarian novels occupied a "liminal position between American anti-Communism and Communist anti-Americanism" (5). The title of her book, The Suburb of Dissent, refers to the position occupied by Thirties literary leftists, "somewhere between the mainstream urban intellectuals and a version of 'the people' imagined as being rural" (6).

The critique of stereotypical art that was integral to the exclusion of Thirties literary leftism from the modernist canon for decades was accompanied by an explanation linking the tendency to create stereotypical art with the ideologically-biased worldview purportedly insisted upon by organizers of the political left. Barbara Foley has extensively refuted the legacy of anti-Stalinism that has distorted interpretations of Thirties culture. Foley disputes allegations of artist manipulation levelled against the Communist Party, and argues that, even when certain leading figures did issue bombastic statements, their influence on writers was negligible. The prominence of stereotypes in Thirties leftist culture, which is acknowledged by critics both hostile and admiring, aligns that culture with a larger tradition of Marxist critical theory, associated with the work of Georg Lukács, which focuses on issues of realism and typicality. While scholarship in the field has revised our understanding of particular aspects of Thirties literary leftism, rediscovering repressed discourses of gender (Paula Rabinowitz, Laura Hapke) and race (William Maxwell, Suzanne Sowinska), few scholars have defended the Marxist theory articulated by literary leftists during the Thirties.
Although many classic works of twentieth-century Marxism were written during the Thirties in Europe, these works generally had no influence in the United States. Limited translations and repressive political conditions prevented Americans from reading not only many of what are now considered the essential writings of Marx and Engels, but also the ground-breaking works of Walter Benjamin, Bertold Brecht, Antonio Gramsci, and Theodor Adorno. The tactical choices that were made by American Marxists in the absence of the writings which are now seen as cornerstones of cultural studies have led some scholars, such as Frank Lentricchia, to characterize the decade's American Marxism as economically deterministic, syndicalist, and anti-intellectual.\(^5\)

My dissertation takes issue with the characterizations of Lentricchia and others, contributing to the recent revisionary scholarship of Foley, Denning, and others by examining the effects of classic Marxist theory on the novelistic output of the decade. The Marxist paradigms that were prevalent in America led fiction writers to critique society ideologically. This term pointedly aligns the American Marxism of the Thirties with works written a decade earlier by Georg Lukács. Although Lukács went generally unread during the Thirties, the literary leftism of that decade shares many characteristics with the ideas expressed in his works, particularly in *History and Class Consciousness* and in his *Essays on Realism*. Lukács' writing was strongly influenced by Hegel, and this influence is apparent in his focus on epistemological issues of objective versus subjective modes of knowledge. His analysis interrogates the meaning of typicality, and emphasizes the importance of accuracy as a criteria for representing the experience of the working class in terms that would mobilize them to revolution. The imminence of revolution in

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Lukács' theory, a direct result of his use of Hegel's model of teleological history, provides the basis for Lukács' objective assertions of a class subjectivity that was, although nowhere in existence, inevitable.

Like Lukács, American leftists during the Thirties viewed the working class not only as the most profound class subjectivity, being on the front line of capitalist oppression, but also the class whose consciousness held the keys to an evolution towards socialism. Towards the goal of addressing a working class audience, American leftists engaged a range of mass cultural stereotypes. In both the Third Period culture produced during the first half of the decade, during which time the Socialist Party was at its historical high point, as well as the Popular Front culture produced in the later years of the decade, works of literary leftism were replete with types--representations from an increasingly standardized gallery of formulaic amalgamations of signifiers taken from mass culture. These types were culled from ubiquitous aspects of everyday life. Rita Barnard describes how during the Thirties, "identity and personality were cast as a matter of preconceived and premarketed styles of consumption"(149). Discussing Carl Sandburg, Michael Denning defends stereotypes in a description that is equally true of their larger usage by literary leftists:

[Sandburg] would make these types available to a popular audience, not so they could be regarded with self-congratulatory empathy but so they could be reoccupied with a newly politicized self-awareness. Critics who fault him in this endeavor may feel uncomfortable with the argument that what we are as people may have more to do with our socioeconomic status than with any unique individuality we may possess. (69)

The political potential of stereotypical cultural representations is not an unrelated topic apart from the marginalization of literary leftist works from the modernist canon. It is,
rather, the very reason for that marginalization. Denning's association of mass cultural
types with a class-based self-awareness reinforces the research of Caren Irr and Rita
Barnard, and gestures towards a dialectical opposition that configures the literary
production of leftists during the decade: that of ideology and identity.

Ideology and identity are antithetical modalities in the literary leftism of the
Thirties, and reflect the conflicting identities of the cultural producers, who divided their
efforts between artistic projects and direct involvement in political movements. This
imaginary mode, identitarian fiction, represents subjective experience as essential
expressions of human behavior. This mode defocalizes the variance of human experience
through time, and focalizes the transcendent aspects of consciousness, and is the sort of
consciousness critiqued by Karl Marx in the sixth thesis on Feuerbach, where he
emphasizes that "the human essence is no abstraction inherent in each single individual.
In its reality it is the ensemble of the social relations"(GI 122). This mode creates a
naturalized, individualistic myth of subjectivity that does the cultural work of justifying
and essentializing what are in fact the specific conditions of subjectivity under capitalism:
reified, fragmentary, and socially constructed.

Considering the long-denigrated literary leftism of the Thirties in terms of a
double-vision of ideology and identity clarifies the tensions and contradictions that Cold
War-era critics explained as modernist failures. By the Thirties, the high literary
modernism of the twenties, exemplified in the works of Joyce and Eliot, was hugely
influential across genres and national boundaries. The formal innovations of this first
wave of modernism, which Frank Kermode has specified as paleomodernism,
contextualized experience in structures of myth and religion that inspired American
writers to examine the interconnections between language, narrative, and consciousness. Without attempting to judge modernism within the binarism at hand, it suffices to say that the works of Joyce and Eliot—works which, Paul Buhle notes, "the Party's own intellectuals often admired . . . privately"—effected an inward turn in American fiction (Buhle 176). T.S. Eliot once praised Henry James for having "a mind so fine that no idea could violate it" (Eliot 151). This statement exemplifies the mutually-exclusive oppositional relationship between ideology and identity: Works that foreground the exploration of subjectivity as a transcendent human experience often view totalizing explanations as hubristic overestimations of reason's capability to account for all experience.

In *Our America* Walter Benn Michaels describes the cultural work done by identity during the twenties. Michaels claims that by embracing of a discourse of liberal pluralism, Americans adopted a nativist definition of identity that was articulated through the form of family. This conception replaced the earlier, race-based conception of identity of the Progressive era, and, instead of defining identity in generational or regional terms, defined it in solely cultural terms. As Jake Barnes says of Robert Cohn in *The Sun Also Rises*, he lacks "aficion" (Michaels 28). Michaels interprets the twenties' nativist cultural definition of identity as a continuation of the racism of the Progressive era. Identity is the incoherent concept at the heart of liberal pluralism, Michaels argues, justifying our practices as not better or worse than others, but simply "best for us." As a result, identity merely reflects cultural practice. Race, in Michael's account, is the additional element required of identity to justify our view that our culture is distinctive and different from others. Although *Our America* does not address the perseverance of identitarian claims
into the Thirties, the phenomenon persists in the works of Hemingway, Faulkner, and others, and is particularly apparent, Michaels claims, in narratives of incest and miscegenation.

Literary leftists of the Thirties confronted a mass cultural field of standardized stereotypes and a high cultural, literary field that perpetuated racism through its familial destinies and its spiritualized American-ness. They reacted with paradigms of ideological critique, an aspect of their Lukácsian workerism, creating fiction and criticism that challenged the stereotypes of mass and literary cultural as instances of "false consciousness." As a critical tool, the concept of ideology evoked as many problems as it dispelled, gradually revealing the radical unfixedness of any philosophical grounding on which a non-ideological reality might be founded. Leftist fiction from the Thirties provides a test lab for a variety of styles of ideological critique, re-engaging not only the early writings of Marx and Engels but also broadening the scope of historical materialism by deploying it within narratives that force a confrontation with the novelistic convention of the inner self. The tension between Marx and Freud that appears, for instance, in Agnes Smedley's *Daughter of Earth*, exemplifies the larger productive tension between ideology and identity, a dialectic that can be traced through the literary and critical output of leftist intellectuals throughout the decade.

Chapter One analyzes the decade's literary criticism, focusing on the 1935 American Writers' Congress. Many famous leftist writers and intellectuals either attended or contributed to this conference, including Louis Aragon, John Dos Passos, Langston Hughes, Kenneth Burke, Granville Hicks, and Meridel le Sueur. My analysis centers upon the use of the Hegelian dialectic and draws contrasts between its use at the
Congress and its contemporaneous European definition. In his paper “Revolutionary
Symbolism,” Kenneth Burke suggested that writers ought to stop writing for the workers
and instead address their readers as “the people.” This suggestion strikes me as
representative of the larger shift in national identity that took place during the
Depression. Repulsed by the excesses and horrors of Stalinism, American intellectuals
wanted to preserve the critical aspects of Marxism while denying the scientific claims of
its determinism. Stripped of class specificity, the collective identity of "the people"
posed a national subject that unified and normalized the diverse cultures of the United
States. As the country moved into World War Two, this unifying metaphor gained in
strength and appeal. Its further evolution, through the forties and fifties, into the familiar
types of "smalltown" America, the whitewashed family, and the stereotypes of
Hollywood, reveal the degree to which identity continued to limit and define American
culture.

The tension between ideology and identity is never manifested in exactly the
same way. Some works foreground issues of social causality, while others ignore them.
In many works of leftist fiction, representations of the police, the managerial class, and
the ruling class reflect the ideological approach. These characters, such as the villainous
efficiency expert, Carl Belcher, in Robert Cantwell’s 1934 novel The Land of Plenty, are
typically automatons lacking specific defining traits. I examine this novel at some length
in Chapter Two, paying particular attention to the way that the novel divides the world
between the home-based, private exchanges that humanize the workers, and the
workplace-based, hierarchical behavior that dehumanizes both worker and oppressor. In
this instance of social realism, the more progressive impulses of revolution, embodied in
the violent uprising that ends the novel, are recontained within conservative structures of familial identity. Ideology and identity are at odds in *The Land of Plenty*. Although Cantwell can satirize the regulative discourses of the workplace as ideological, he maintains an unexamined acceptance of the "folksy," hometown family life as a corrective realm that is not itself ideological.

Chapter Three examines Agnes Smedley's 1929 autobiographical novel *Daughter of Earth*, a work in which ideology and identity become tangled in the recollections of an activist's early coming into consciousness. In *Daughter of Earth*, Marie Rogers, a fictionalized version of Smedley, dedicates her life to the international struggle against oppression. The worldview that she develops during her education allows her to formulate an objectivist knowledge of society. This view sustains a lifetime career of activism. But Marie explains the course her life has taken in terms of her upbringing and always defines herself as possessing an identity that has predetermined her education, knowledge, and activism. Smedley's narrative shows the interrelation of public and private, political and personal, worker and person, and ideology and identity.

Chapter Four examines the degree to which Thirties leftist fiction practiced a variant of ideological critique. Novels practiced ideological critique, I argue, insofar as they presented ideas within subjective and intersubjective frameworks that showed the contradictions and hidden motives behind those ideas. Just as a key strategy in the early works of Marx and Engels was that of unmasking the vested interests hidden within systems of thought that claimed objectivity, one of the key strategies in leftist fiction was to challenge objectivist discourses by dramatizing their subjective deployments. I look at Steinbeck's California labor trilogy-- *In Dubious Battle*, *Of Men and Men* and *The*
Grapes of Wrath—as separate attempts to reinterpret the objective reports of the Depression within subjective frameworks. His efforts, whose radical impulses are reabsorbed into patterns of family and nation, reflect the impinging codes of mass culture. The works of Nathanael West, by contrast, confront American hegemony with a relentless critique which grants no quarter to the humanist mythologies of mass culture. His work shows an increasing awareness of the depths at which social control grips the subject.

Chapter Five focuses on how the dichotomy between identity and ideology dissolves in works by African-American literary leftists. While the stereotypes of mass culture were effectively deconstructed by novelists who practiced a fictional variant of ideological critique, the stereotypes associated with African-American culture had more resilience and co-optability for literary leftists. This chapter contributes to the recent work of Bill Maxwell, James Smethurst, and others, who have shown the degree to which the careers of African-American modernist authors such as Langston Hughes, Claude McKay, and Richard Wright were assisted by involvement with the Communist Party of the United States (CPUSA). Despite Wright's public disavowal of communism in later years, his fictional output during the Depression, during which time he had recently officially joined the CPUSA, reflects the influence of Marxist ideas. His fiction uses stereotypes and other folk vernacular tropes of authenticity in a way that locates him within the tradition that Houston Baker Jr. calls the "mastery of form," and indicates a double-edged narrative style in which an apparently realist narrative takes on symbolic resonances, signifying multiple messages through a single story. While Richard Wright's masterpiece Native Son is sometimes interpreted as disconnected from the vernacular folk
culture of African-American literature, this is a mistaken reading that ignores the presence of such culture in Wright's other works. *Native Son*'s empty subjectivity is significant not so much as a negation of African-American folk identity but rather as an argument against the forces that erase it from judicial discourses.

This survey of literary leftism finds historical antecedents to present-day themes of the academic humanities in the novels and short stories of the Thirties, in which authors unknowingly deployed an organic variant of ideological critique. Despite the potentially misleading scientific and determinist Marxism that surfaced in critical discourse and articulations of *New Masses* editorial policy, the fiction produced by literary leftists was not politically prescribed or discursively hermetic. Rather, it reflected many of the insights of Lukácsian literary theory, seeking symbolically-resonant topics that could be analyzed through descriptive realism. The commonalities between Lukács and the literary left of the Thirties provides a means of analyzing the prevalent Hegelianism in their works. The presence of Hegelian paradigms does not render works of leftist literature obsolete. Rather, they light an alternate legacy for critical Marxism, showing how the Habermasian ideal of communicative rationality is accommodated by the narrative strategies of novelistic discourse.
Chapter One
Disguised Theology of the Master-Wizard:
Critical and Scientific Marxism in Depression-Era Literary Criticism

Why should the drama of subject and object, the fraught narrative of their couplings and splittings, matchings and misalliances, have so consistently dominated the modern philosophical stage, like the tale of two incompatible partners continually warring to gain an edge over each other, who nevertheless cannot relinquish their fatal fascination for one another and resolve yet again, after another painful separation, to make a go of it?

Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*

This chapter argues that Marxism failed in America in the Thirties not because of the shortcomings of its philosophy, but rather because of the nationalism that arose on the eve of World War Two. This argument—that material conditions of the United States during those years predetermined the reception of Marxist theories of ideology—repeats the ideological critique by early Marx that American writers, in different ways, misunderstood and rejected. Although many critics then and since have argued that it was the Hegelian idealism of European Marxism that contaminated American leftism and made it indigestible in the United States, I argue that what was truly indigestible in American leftism was its defiance of the doctrine of American exceptionalism and radical self-determination. Rather than moving beyond Hegel—a theoretical move that is easier said than done—progressive intellectuals can learn much from the critical theory articulated in the early work of Marx.

As socialism made inroads into American culture during the Thirties, the lexicon of Marxist philosophy spread from philosophy and sociology into aesthetic theory and political discourse, as well as a broader, general usage. Rarified terms and concepts,
foremost among them the dialectic, traversed the Atlantic from the tradition of German Idealism and entered American conversations about economics, international politics, social planning, and cultural criticism. These terms also influenced artists and writers, and their effects can be traced in their works, which contain dramatized models of social causality that formulate the relationship between individual and society in ways that reflect an active engagement with paradigms of Marxist philosophy.

The reputation of Thirties literature as dogmatic is too often associated with the fiction and poetry produced during that decade. These subject-centered discourses are so multimodal and diverse in their philosophical assumptions that these accusations are misplaced. Unfortunately, the objectivist discourses that surrounded literary production during the decade—the editorials, critiques, philosophical and sociological analyses, and journalism—do not so easily avoid the charges of predetermined conclusions, harsh critical denunciations, and an often hubristic sense of their own perspective's inevitability.¹ Perhaps the best-known instance of shabby interpretation by a Thirties communist is that of Richard Wright, who, in his scathing review of Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* for the *New Masses*, compared her novel to a minstrel show, designed to make white people laugh, claiming that the novel "carries no theme, no message, no thought" (Hurston viii). The degree to which Wright's own fiction is able to rise above the narrow concerns he brought to bear on Hurston's work suggests that the

¹ Pierre Bourdieu distinguishes between objectivist and subjectivist sociology in "Social Space and Symbolic Power." He cites Marx and Durkheim as examples of objectivism, because they view the causes of social life as outside of consciousness, and cites Alfred Schütz and the field of ethnomethodologists as examples of subjectivism, because they view social science as founded on common sense knowledge. "The opposition is total," Bourdieu writes, "in the first instance, scientific knowledge can be obtained only by means of a break with primary representations—called 'pre-notions' in Durkheim and 'ideologies' in Marx—leading to unconscious causes. In the second instance, scientific knowledge is in continuity with common-sense knowledge, since it is nothing but a 'construct of constructs'(In Other Words124).
objectivist genre of criticism is more accommodating of the dogmatic aspects of Marxism than the subjectivist genres of literature. The New Masses editors were explicit regarding the instrumental role that literary criticism was to play in the class war, writing in a 1934 New Masses article entitled "Author's Field Day: A Symposium on Marxist Criticism": "After all, revolutionary criticism, quite as much as revolutionary fiction, is a weapon in the class struggle" (qtd. Pells 171).

It was criticism, not literature, that declared art a class weapon in the early Thirties, and the shortcomings of this propagandistic view of culture have been much discussed. The critical consensus regarding the politicization of art and the instrumentality of culture was not shared by the novelists. In their work, a wide variety of philosophical ideas were proposed and examined. The diversity of views present in novels produced during the early Thirties has not always been apparent in the historic accounts of the decade. Attempts to categorize literary leftism of the Thirties has often led to critical works that focus on certain subgenres, while de-emphasizing others, and then build arguments, defenses, or attacks, on the isolated subgenres, without considering the larger context of ideas with which the works, at least initially, were in dialogue.²

Consider, for instance, the leftist novels of the worst year of the Depression, 1934. Regardless of later mischaracterizations, and despite contemporary admonitions from communists to write solely worker-based realism, 1934 saw the publication of a range of leftist novels that were by no means limited by predetermined political imperatives. Tess Slesinger published The Unpossessed, a satire of the bourgeoisie turned revolutionary. James Farrell published The Young Manhood of Studs Lonigan, a ghetto pastoral about a
decidedly unrevolutionary proletariat. Guy Endore published *Babouk*, a fictional exploration of history loosely based on the Haitian slave insurrection of 1791. Looking no further than these three works we already have three different stances of the function of culture. Slesinger's novel, in which characters "are really motivated more by personal concerns than political ones," provides a model of social causality that attributes primacy to the subject (Booker 306). Farrell's account of Studs Lonigan's life dramatizes a social causality that runs the other way, rooted in the larger structures of society that influence Studs's rough life. *Babouk*'s historical fiction questions social causality even more radically in his study of a historical case of revolution. The protagonist, Babouk, is a renegade slave whose source of power is his ability to narrate. By focusing on a storyteller as the key figure in his exploration of the interrelation of history and fiction, Endore explores the ways that narrative forms constantly rewrite and reimagine the past.

In chapter four I argue that Steinbeck's novels are prime examples of ideological critique, describing the function of ideas in ways that corroborate the early Hegelian writings of Marx and Engels. The combination of realist and modernist techniques that appeared not only in Steinbeck's but also in many novels of the Thirties, provides an effective set of critical tools that examine society, like critical Marxism, in terms of the vested material interests that underlie and inform the dominant ideas of the era. Exploring the inter-relatedness of subjectivity using free indirect discourse, these novels attempt to fuse patterns of the totality into emotional forms and narratives in which the human can find meaning. By maintaining a modicum of realism, these novels situate ideas within structures of lived experience, exploring language's innate symbolic capabilities and

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2 See Pells 188-189.
analyzing the way that such patterns are invested with power. Novels that achieve an equipoise between ideology and identity are dialectical: they reflect the experience of the novelist's imagination as it describes the contradictions and contraries of the social totality.

The difference between the critical orientation of Thirties fiction, compared to the hard-edged, scientific orientation of the literary criticism, is discernable in the work produced by critics, who condemned the early works of Marx on the grounds that they were poisoned by Hegelian metaphysics. In 1934, Max Eastman, co-founder and former editor of The Masses (1913-1918), mounted an attack on Hegel in an essay that appeared in the New Republic. Eastman claimed that Hegel contaminated Marxism with the notion "that reality is made out of ideas" (NR 36). Eastman scoffed at the non-scientific "scientific socialism," reminding his readers that Hegel, the "master wizard," designed the dialectic "back when our grandparents were believing in the literal licks of hell's flames up the pants-legs of the sinner" (36). He then traced a direct lineage from Hegel to the present Soviet state, condemning historical materialism:

It is a systematic philosophy of the universe, being propagated through the world by the Russian Bolsheviks. This philosophy is conceived by them with a dogmatic finality, and believed in with a bigotry of cosmic conviction so foreign to the skeptical and empirical temper of our own Anglo-Saxon culture that we cannot imagine it. (Eastman 35)

To hear Eastman speak of Bolshevism in 1934 reveals the rootedness of his experience in the earlier decades' revolutionary movements. By the mid-Thirties, it was sixteen years since the Bolshevik (in Russian, "majority") Party had become, simply, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, and by 1934 the philosophy of the Bolsheviks--Leninism--was
largely irrelevant to the changes taking place there. Eastman's conflation of earlier and later moments of recent history allowed him to make an even larger conflation of two distinct aspects of Marxism, which he then dismissed wholesale, based on a racist and nativist evocation of Anglo-Saxon culture. It seems shockingly ahistorical to defend a culture against a Northern European philosophy by evoking a cultural tradition from Northern Europe, but this speaks of the degree to which Marxism was becoming identified not as a critique from within our culture, but rather as a threat from Russia.

The two aspects of Marxism which are conflated in Eastman's essay can be broadly defined as scientific and critical Marxism. In his excellent and underappreciated critical trilogy The Dark Side of the Dialectic, Alvin Gouldner turns the tools of sociology onto the history of Marxism. The vastly different projects that have been undertaken in Marx's name can be explained, Gouldner argues, based on a primary contraction that exists within Marxism, between critique and science:

Critical Marxists see the future of revolution as depending on the clarity of awareness and the vigor in inner, conscious commitment, on a consciousness that can be imprinted on history like a kind of germ matter, by those with courage. Scientific Marxists, however, see the revolution's future as vouchsafed not by the revolutionary's clear-sighted heroism, but by history itself; by the inexorable contradictions of each society; by the scientific appraisal of these contradictions; and by exploiting the political crises created by these unfolding contradictions. (Gouldner 46)

Critical Marxists typically draw from the early writings of Marx and Engels, such as the Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844, the Communist Manifesto, The German Ideology, and the "Theses on Feuerbach." Invoking Thomas Kuhn's theory of paradigm construction, Gouldner describes these works as instances of a theory in its early, open-
ended phase of "paradigm coalescence"(133). These works of "young Marxism" focus on alienation and freedom, and are voluntaristic in that they emphasize the interconnectedness of thought and action(133). Gouldner writes: "Critical Marxism is thus precisely an activistic 'theory of praxis' (in Gramsci's terms), focused on the shifting dialectic of subject and object"(48). Scientific Marxists, on the other hand, cite the later texts of Marx—the Grundrisse, Capital, and the Critique of Political Economy—as the sources of a definitive Marxism. These later works are more deterministic and structuralist than the earlier works. The emphasis on the commodity, and the engagement with the principles of political economy, de-emphasize the potential of change at the level of the subject.

In the twentieth century, Lenin is the most significant example of critical Marxism. His attempts to form a vanguard party and to seize power despite the fact that, according to scientific Marxism, the objective material conditions that would allow revolution were not yet in place, show the central role of voluntarism that accompanied his Marxist theory. Other examples of twentieth-century critical Marxists include Georg Lukács, the Frankfurt School, as well as virtually all Western academics that continue to use and teach Marxism. Cuba and China are both instances of critical Marxist revolutions in which change was not simply a matter of structural alterations, but also focused on the importance of changing consciousness and redefining human nature. Scientific Marxism's largest twentieth-century example is the totalitarianism of Stalin. Instead of responding dialectically to the changing conditions of the Soviet Union throughout the Thirties and forties, Stalin's government remained focused on changing the material conditions—the industrial, economic, and technological institutions of the infrastructure—proceeding with
the belief that human nature could not itself change until the larger historical forces had evolved.

Eastman's essay fails to distinguish between these disparate schools of Marxism, and as a result holds Hegel responsible for the closed, scientific Marxism of the Soviet State circa 1934. This contradicts the demarcation between the voluntaristic, Hegelian Marxism and the deterministic, Darwinian Marxism outlined by Gouldner, who writes: "Some part of this theoretical tension is organized as a conflict between those supporting (and those rejecting) the importance of Hegel for Marx, and between those using and those rejecting a more Hegelian conception of 'ideology critique'"(38). How could Eastman, one of the foremost Marxist literary critics of the early part of the century, have failed to realize the schism between the two Marxisms? The question is partially answered in the influence that international identity played in his political formulations. But why did Eastman indict Soviet socialism inaccurately, fusing it with Hegelian ideological critique? The answer can be found in the availability of translations of classic Marxist texts. In 1934, scarcely any of Marx's early works were available to Americans, especially if they could not read German. The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844 were not translated. The German Ideology had only recently been published (in Russian in 1927, in German in 1932,) and would not be translated into English until 1947. The "Theses on Feuerbach" were only available in a version posthumously edited by Engels in 1891.

The limited availability of translations forced American leftists to rely on Soviet interpretations of the works of young Marx. As a result, the works of American leftist critics often confusingly merged the lexicon of the early Hegelian Marxism with the
determinism of the later, ossified, Soviet scientific Marxism. Eastman was not inaccurate in reacting to the strong tendency of some American leftist writers to succumb to a deterministic stance in which "their account of the changing world and their plans for changing it become one and the same," but he incorrectly attributed this determinism to Hegel (NR 38).

Before looking at the further developments of the dialectic during the Thirties, some clarification is required regarding the specificity of Hegel's definition. Eastman focused his attack on Hegel on his concept of the historical dialectic, in which thesis and antithesis confront each other as opposites and then are synthesized into a new, higher form that accommodates the differences between the earlier terms. He writes of Marx: "To declare that 'proletarian and wealth are opposites' is such loose thinking that to us it seems obvious the purpose must be other than the definition of fact with a view to verified knowledge" (NR 37). Attacking Hegel's influence over Lenin, he writes:

The science of psychology, with all its failings, has done enough for us so that when a man makes, in dead earnest, such preposterous assertions as that + and -, action and reaction, wealth and proletariat, particular and general, bear the same relation to each other--still more, that wealth and proletarian resolve their opposition in the social revolution with the same "self-active motion" with which a mind resolves in practice the "opposition" between contemplation and abstract thought--we know that he is driven, whether consciously or not, by some motive other than a desire to understand the world. (NR 37)

These descriptions contribute to a model of the dialectic that make it vulnerable to charges of "disguised theology," and the case as set forth by Eastman echoes dismissals of the dialectic and of critical Marxism in general that have been repeatedly asserted throughout the century. Eastman accused Marx and Lenin of having motives other than
understanding. He was right in the sense that the purpose of philosophy for both these thinkers was not to interpret the world but to change it. But it was Eastman who misunderstood when he formulated Hegelianism as a philosophy that pigeonholed material reality into an abstract, unvarying dialectic.

Eastman's characterization of the dialectic as a philosophy that encouraged its users "to regard partisanship as 'deeper' than objective investigation" misunderstood Hegel's formulation, in which the dialectic arises precisely from intuition(38). Eastman condemned the dialectic as a concept that overestimated the power of rational thought to overcome oppositions, all taking place within the consciousness of the Geist, a master subject that transcends the totality. But Hegel started not with an overarching, all-inclusive Geist, but rather with the simple act of perception. The dialectic does not take place between essentialized ideals; it is centered on the cognitive process, in which subjective and objective are not separable but are symbiotically bound together. It is not enough to engage in "a formal and unsystematic dialectic which . . . thinks vaguely of the absolute as the totality of determinations"(Hegel 530). Rather, "the exposition, and in fact the self-exposition, of the absolute" is what is required(530).

The Hegelian dialectic is foremost a process: the unfolding of consciousness as it confronts the world. Starting with the act of contemplating pure being, the mind, confronted by the manifold of undifferentiated phenomena, finds it devoid of any intrinsic meaning. To overcome the apparent contradiction between being and nothingness, the mind recognizes a difference between "being-in-itself" and "being-for-itself," in which the former term describes how an existent appears as an object, and the latter describes how an existent experiences itself as a subject. A hypothetical instance can help
dramatize this: A being in a field at midnight notices it is dark. Later, as the dawn rises, that being notices a difference that arises through time, in a space that has remained the same. Thus cognition, through time and space, perceives sameness and difference, and synthesizes perception to realize that the actual time of day is contrasted by the potential, in this example, of being either night or day. David Caute summarizes this fundamental distinction:

The gulf between actual reality and potential reality is the starting point of the dialectical process. If we call the existent ‘A’, then its identity contains the contradiction of ‘A’ and ‘non-A’. Thus ‘A’ is self-contradictory; it begets its own ‘negation’. The negation is in turn self-contradictory and is negated. ‘A’ constantly surpasses itself in a process of continuous movement. (Caute 31)

From the uncomplicated contemplation of pure being, a process of differentiation arises, in which two objects are both similar and different, with some shared characteristics but others that distinguish them. In a third act--synthesis--the mind reconciles the apparent differences within a framework of sameness, thus leading to a larger, revised understanding of the world. Thus, from the simple act of contemplation develops the subject's understanding of reality. This understanding describes reality as a totality insofar as it is the only means by which subjects can rationally interface with the world they inhabit.

The Hegelian definition of totality does not succumb to a narrow rationalism, however, because the totality which is created by the mind, cannot be seen as originating within the mind. The human mind can only distinguish difference and sameness within a framework that precedes and is outside of those same processes of differentiation. This framework is described in Kant's foundational theory of the subject, which posits a
network of a priori categories of thought within which all observations take place. Hegel took Kant's transcendental subject as a starting point. Perception, limited by space and time, understands the world through sameness and difference, which are restatements of the a priori elements in cognitive terms. But this understanding, although realized through the subject, is not grounded within it. Hegel claimed that history is the unfolding of consciousness through dialectic processes. The totality towards which reason and understanding strive--the Geist, a master-subject that encompasses and synthesizes the contradictions of the whole of reality--is paradoxically defined as both preceding time and space, and being revealed by them. Hegel's ontology accommodates this paradox as signs of knowledge's yet uncompleted teleological movement through history.

The contradictions that Eastman scoffingly cited as instances of dialectical essentialism are in actuality a variety of different phenomena which all have different Kantian categorical relations to one another. They only assume "the same relation to each other" in polemical paraphrasings of Hegelianism, not in the actual philosophical system itself. Eastman hoped to cut the Gordian knot of ontology--the conflict between idealism and determinism--by asserting the materialism of "current science" to replace the romantic "socialism which pretends to be, and seems to be 'scientific'"(35). But this materialist updating of Marx did not in fact improve Marx's historical materialism, but instead re-emphasized one pole of the pendulum-like dialectic movement which Marx had recognized in the history of philosophy, between subjective idealism and objective determinism. Like Daniel Bell and Francis Fukuyama, who each claimed that the telos of Hegelian history had come to an end, Max Eastman claimed that science had evolved past ideology.
The work of Max Eastman provides the clearest articulation of an anti-Hegelianism that was prevalent among many leftist intellectuals of the Thirties. The debates on the left from this era conflated critical and scientific Marxism, and this is true not only of the attackers of Hegel but also of his defenders. The call by American critics and philosophers for more new science to append Marxism shows the degree to which they were applying a scientific Marxism that deferred revolutionary change in the present in the name of the need for more knowledge. This misunderstanding can be understood in part as a mistranslation of *Wissenschaft*, a key term of Marx which has been typically been too narrowly translated as science, when in fact for Marx the term meant any organized system of thought.

The Thirties critics' retention of science as a discourse with privileged truth-claims, and the separation from social thought that it implied, is symptomatic of the fetishization of technology that was and is an integral component of the dominant ruling ideas of American capitalism. In *Marxism and Form* Fredric Jameson attributes the American inability to comprehend the social groundedness of ideological critique to the real threat this discourse poses to America's self-justifying views:

It is therefore the very structure of historical materialism--the doctrine of the unity of thinking and action, or of the social determination of thought--which is irreducible to pure thought or to contemplation; and this, which the Western middle-class philosophical tradition can only understand as a flaw in the system, refuses us in the very moment in which we imagine ourselves to be refusing it. (161)

3 For example, Edmund Wilson, in *To The Finland Station*, wrote "The Dialectic ... is a religious myth, disencumbered of divine personality and tied up with the history of mankind ... From the moment that they [Marx and Engels] had admitted the Dialectic into their semi-materialistic system, they had admitted an element of mysticism" (1940, rpt. Garden City: Doubleday, 1953), pp. 194, 189.
Jameson's defense of the dialectic is not an insistence on returning to the "true" Marx. As Gouldner has shown, Marx's work contains aspects of both critique and science. It is, rather, a wariness against the tendencies of scientific Marxism--both in the Soviet Union and the United States--towards a deferral of change, and a resignation from struggle based on the view that, as Gramsci put it, "the worse it gets, the better that will be" (Gramsci 161). Like the subtitle of Kubrick's *Doctor Strangelove*--"How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb"--proponents of progressive science, insofar as they separated science from the social interests they served, risked succumbing to nationalistic policies that perpetuated domination and threatened global war.

One of the few critics to understand and defend the early, Hegelian aspects of Marx was Sidney Hook, who, like Eastman, had been a student of John Dewey's. Hook fused Marxism with pragmatism in two books during the Thirties: *Towards the Understanding of Karl Marx* (1933) and *From Hegel to Marx* (1936). In these works, Hook opposed Stalinism with arguments calling for greater attention to the early works of Marx. Hook, who read German, was able to call upon passages from the only recently published *The German Ideology*, and this provided him with an understanding of critical Marxism that allowed him to emphasize, in *Towards the Understanding of Karl Marx*, the reciprocal nature of the relationship between the material world and human thought:

> From objective conditions, social and natural (thesis), there arises human needs and purposes which, in recognizing the objective possibilities in the given situation (antithesis) set up a course of action (synthesis) designed to actualize these possibilities. (Hook 84)
Hook reiterated that the dialectic took place not between economic base and cultural superstructure, as defined in Soviet-affiliated versions of dialectical materialism, but rather between the world and human thought and behavior. Each stage of history created particular needs and desires in humans, who, through reasoning, formulated synthesizing solutions. This formulation allowed for a sense of freedom that Hook claimed traced a lineage from Marx to Dewey.

Hook's understanding of the critical potency of the dialectic, and his deep reading in the works of Hegel, make him exceptional among American writers during the Thirties. Unfortunately, his work passed all but unnoticed by contemporary literary critics, especially those who were still aligned with the Soviet Union. Two years after the publication of *Towards the Understanding of Karl Marx*, the American Writers' Congress (AWC) held its first meeting. This meeting, "the culmination of the left avant-garde renaissance, the burgeoning of the proletarian literature movement with its little magazines, its John Reed Clubs, and its theater groups," was the last attempt to organize a revolutionary synthesis of the scientific Marxism of the labor movement with the critical Marxism of the intellectuals and artists (Denning 442). They had little use for Hook, who was uninvited, presumably as a result of his sympathetic alignment with Trotsky. His absence is remarkable, as the conference was attended by a roster of famous intellectual leftists of the Thirties, including Richard Wright, Langston Hughes, Kenneth Burke, Jack Conroy, Joseph Freeman, James Farrell, Meridel le Sueur, and Granville Hicks. John Dos Passos and Louis Aragon also contributed essays for the conference.

It is tempting to imagine how the conference would have been altered by the understanding of early Marx that Hook emphasized. In retrospect, the conference marks
the last chapter in what has been periodicized by Barbara Foley as Third Period Marxism, the Leninist Marxism of the early Thirties after which "literary proletarianism failed to move ahead and develop because the priorities of the left-wing movement . . . altered dramatically with the Popular Front"(127). Third Period Marxism was characteristically internationalist and strongly focused on forming a coalition between workers and the "vanguard" intellectuals who would implement the revolutionary overthrow of international capitalism. One year after the Congress, Stalin's Comintern would announce a new Popular Front policy that make overtures to the liberal bourgeoisie. The American communists shifted their slogan from the Third Period "Towards a Soviet America" to the Popular Front "Communism is Twentieth-Century Americanism." In the years that followed, as "a generation of plebeian artists and intellectuals came to staff the agencies of the federal government and the studios of the culture industries," the country witnessed "the extraordinary flowering of arts, entertainment, and thought based on the broad social movement that came to be known as the Popular Front"(Denning xviii, xvi).

The AWC occurred at a pivotal moment in the philosophical history of the decade. Rita Barnard describes 1935 as "the high point of leftist solidarity"(Barnard 45). During 1934 the left organized general strikes in Toledo, Minneapolis, and San Francisco. Daniel Aaron describes the Congress as both "a culmination of something old as well as a beginning of something new"(Aaron 284). Although the meeting faced forward, marking the foundation of the League of American Writers, it was also a summing up of the past few years of literary efforts by the left. Looking back, American writers could see the limits of their good intentions in the project of establishing a bond with the working class. Some policies retrospectively seemed like dead ends. Many speakers raised critiques
against earlier strategies that had failed and proposed new strategies to replace them. But writers were still grappling with paradigms of class hermeneutics, posing questions to themselves as to whether or not their own instincts, and their own sense of reason, were shared by the workers, or instead were symptomatic reflections of their middle-class status, with its complicity within larger structures of capitalist oppression.

The solutions articulated by many speakers at the conference were similar to those of Georg Lukács, their Hungarian contemporary, in the sense that they saw all of culture as based on class position, although not equally so. Like Lukács, they theorized ideas as superstructural reflections of the relations of production that defined the roles played by all, including both dock workers and literary critics. But also like Lukács, they wanted to assign special status to the ideology of the workers, bestowing it with a stronger, scientific truth value: all class ideologies were created equal, but some were more equal than others. For Lukács, the contradictory nature of these two ideas were signs of their concrete universality, the Hegelian phrase used by Marx to describe how the proletariat was both the embodiment of capitalism and the irreconcilable kernel within it that pointed to its impending replacement by socialism. The apparent contradiction between the idea that the middle-class writers could speak to workers based on a universal view of reason and the idea that reason itself was an historically-determined social construct that could not be used to effect change but could only be used later to summarize it, flying like Minerva's owl only at dusk, is articulated both in Lukács' Hegelian criticism and in the proceedings of the 1935 AWC.

The debates of class hermeneutics that were waged at the 1935 AWC centered largely around the concept of the dialectic. One of the stated aims of the conference put
forth in the call to writers was to "provide technical discussion of the literary applications of Marxist philosophy"(Hart 11). This technical discussion revolved around the dialectic, "the core of Marx's Hegelian inheritance," with writers offering a range of interpretations of what the term meant(Caute 31). The diverse interpretations of the dialectic that were presented at the conference may explain why many of the papers refer to it in the plural rather than the singular. The critics, especially, applied dialectics broadly, seeing self-negating processes in sociology, history, and class relations. Granville Hicks, for instance, in his paper "The Dialectics of the Development of Marxist Criticism" used the dialectic to understand the recent history of the last thirty years of American literary criticism as an evolution towards a unified theory that would "take into account all aspects of literature"(Hart 96). This synthesis had not occurred already, Hicks reasoned, because there was never before a diverse body of experiential proletarian fiction. The suffering and hardship caused by the Depression had brought a flowering of diverse stories, allowing for "a far more adequate unification" of literature and politics(98).

There is a strain of Hegelian thought in Hicks' description of the dialectic that brings with it some dubious assertions. Namely, Hicks' descriptions of the historical evolution of the dialectic have a tendency to idealize the form with an agency all its own: "The dialectic process is at work," wrote Hicks, and in closing, repeated: "the dialectic process will go on"(96, 98). This emphasis on process is unmistakably an affirmation of Hegel's definition, and yet in this context it seems to inject an artificial separation between thought and world. Another unpleasant side-effect of Hegelian philosophy as it appears in Hicks' paper is a teleological sense of history as a progress that culminates in the present. Hicks wrote:
Particularly since the Depression it has been easier for critics with bourgeois training to adopt the proletarian point of view because it has been so much clarified. The progress of the revolutionary movement has been a great factor in the forging of a unified system of criticism. (96)

Just as Hegel's claim that the history of reason ended with him has been cast in dubious light by history's continuation, so must Hicks' announcement of the achieved synthesis of literature and politics through criticism be contextualized within his circumstances, as editor (since 1934) of the most prominent organ of proletarian fiction, the New Masses.

Hicks reproduced dialectical materialism in its more deterministic, scientific formulation. It was not, for Hicks, the warning against idealism that it was for Hook. Hicks' survey of recent history describes revolutionary and dialectic forces that themselves appear to transcend history. In his essay, as in those of others, the separation between worker and writer that still existed, despite its disavowals, is resolved, rhetorically, by the concept of revolution, a term which glosses the real differences in class position between workers and writers. Hicks granted that the critics who took a stand with the workers would "inevitably seem to dogmatize and prescribe," but this is the result of their having perceived the revolutionary perspective of the working class, and is thus preferable to writing from experience(98). Hicks spoke: "The attempt to write criticism in terms of experience and sensibility, rather than ideas and attitudes, may, though certainly sound in itself, lead to vagueness, aestheticism, and a kind of ivory tower"(97). In these comments, Hicks articulated a dedication to abstraction and reason that reflected his Third Period faith in ideology.

Hicks' use of the dialectic reflected the ambivalence between the potential for voluntaristic change in the present and the determinism of scientific laws of history that
was present in the works of Marx. But what Hicks overlooked was the degree to which his own conclusions may not have been objective descriptions of transhistorical forces, but rather, themselves, instances of ideology. In *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels theorize that ideology and its "corresponding forms of consciousness . . . have no history, no development. . . . Life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life"(*GI* 47). This radical historicity, refusing to allow any potential for a discourse on history to break, epistemologically, from its rooted context in the present, threatens to undermine all hopes for rational reflection and understanding the past. But this is not a possibility that Hicks confronted at the AWC. This can be partially attributed, as with Eastman, to an understanding of Marx limited by translated resources and Soviet bias, but it also points to a larger blindness present in the works of critics at the conference: although they can theorize mainstream, conventional thought as ideological, they cannot turn those insights back onto the material conditions that undergird their own ideas.

The widespread use of the term dialectic by many writers at the AWC creates an illusory consensus, hiding the distinguishing specificities of the different uses, but the differences are crucial. Once the dialectic process is imagined as somehow outside of human consciousness, as it is in the model of dialectical materialism, with its economic base and cultural superstructure, it becomes mechanistic and deterministic. But if it is retained at the level of immediacy and perception, it allows its theorists to realize that no aspects of reality have pre-set meanings or structural locations. This critical understanding of the dialectic encourages a self-reflexivity which focuses on the importance of individual interpretation and action.
Waldo Frank took a decisively critical Marxist stance in his paper, "Values of a Revolutionary Writer." Frank argued that, although activism was important, the revolutionary writer was justified in focusing on literary production, an "autonomous kind of action . . . coordinate with, not subordinate to, the political-economic aspects of the re-creation of mankind" (71). Frank described how an understanding of the totality was based on a split in the self, dividing between self-as-object and self-as-subject:

We must go into life . . . in person and in self. These two ways are really one; and the writer must go them together, else he will make headway in neither. If we look upon persons or classes, save with the eye of self-knowledge, we will not see them; and if we look inward upon self, save with an eye disciplined by objective understanding, we will see only the mists of egoism which are the true self's denial. Even more complex is this double way we must take, and never cease from taking. If we look upon persons of one class, we will not know them unless we see the class opposing. If we look upon the present of any scene, we will not know it unless we see within it the past . . . and its dynamic direction: its future. This is the dialectic of the artist. (76-77)

Frank's definition of the artist's dialectic extents to encompass larger patterns of oppositions, but it begins with and situates itself within the understanding of the self. In opposition to the dialectical perspective, Frank described "the hidden ideology of the American system":

This American ideology, which has ruled from the beginning--from the time of those prophets of bourgeois business: Benjamin Franklin and Alexander Hamilton, the true masters of our way of life--is a shallow, static rationalism derived from the thinnest, not the deepest, eighteenth-century minds of France and Britain: an empirical rationalism based on fact-worship, on a fetishism (both unscientific and unpoetic) of the finished cut-and-dried report of the five senses, which is not remotely related
to the organic rationalism explicit in Spinoza and implicit
in the historical dialectic of Marx. (77)

Frank used ideology specifically in keeping with the established, negative definition
deployed by Marx and Engels. The remedy to the excessive rationalism of the American
ideology, for him, was a self-reflective knowledge of the self and a philosophical view
that emphasized the degree to which reality was a product of consciousness.

Fiction writers at the AWC emphasized the critical aspects of Marxism in their
papers, and reaffirmed Frank's definition of the novel as the dialectical combination of
subjective and objective discourses. Edwin Seaver, a novelist, defined proletarian fiction
by its concern with "the materialist dialectic"(100). In "The Writer as Technician," John
Dos Passos defined the writer as technician in the sense that s/he did not perform wage-
labor, but instead worked by developing materials and extracting possibilities. Dos Passos
described how the novelist's practice of addressing the present through language, with its
meanings connecting present with past and individual with collective, led writers into an
understanding beyond that of rational, objectivist belief-systems:

No matter from how narrow a set of convictions you start,
you will find yourself in your effort to probe deeper and
deeper into men and events as you find them, less and less
able to work with the minute prescriptions of doctrine; and
you will find more and more that you are on the side of the
men, women and children alive right now against all the
contraptions and organizations, however magnificent their
aims may be, that bedevil them. (82)

Both Seaver and Dos Passos foregrounded the self as the means by which all knowledge
of the world is received. The descriptions that they produced of the self's simultaneously
outward and inward progress, with knowledge gained by a dialectic between abstract
categories and specific instances of real life are not put forth as prescriptions of a yet
unrealized utopian perspective. Rather, they retraced the contours of the Hegelian self, describing as directly as possible the self-contradictory aspects inherent to consciousness. While the more objectivist passages in the conference papers of both novelists and critics would often drift into mystical homage to the dialectic as a spirit abstracted from society and history, the authorial descriptions of the novelistic imagination indicate the degree to which leftist fiction writers were engaged in Hegelian paradigms, attempting to answer questions about society as a totality by interrogating the division and categorization by which the self interpreted its surroundings.

The focus I have brought to bear on the AWC--examining the degree to which the dialectic was evoked as a novelistic heuristic--deviates from the issues that defined the conference for those attending. The philosophical papers I have cited have been chosen selectively, not as representatives of the dominant issues of the conference. Attendees brought a pragmatic focus to the AWC, seeking coalitions both nationally and internationally.

The paper that would provide the most famous moment of the conference came from Kenneth Burke. In "Revolutionary Symbolism," Burke suggested that leftist writers "take 'the people' rather than 'the worker' as our basic symbol of exhortation and allegiance"(Hart 93). The worker was too negative a symbol, Burke argued, and instead should be replaced by the more positive, ideal symbol of the people. Refuting what he saw as an "anti-intellectualist, semi-obscurantist trend" within proletarian literature, Burke suggested that writers attempt to speak to the people "as so conditioned by the reactionary forces in control of our main educational channels"(90, 89). Burke admonished writers to adopt a language of "spontaneous popular usage" and advised
leftist intellectuals who wanted to contribute to the revolutionary cause to approach their work like advertisers selling cigarettes, a practice which for Burke was in keeping with "the way in which the best artists of the religious era recommended or glorified their faith"(90, 91).

Immortalized in novels and memoirs, Burke's role as the harbinger of a new era of leftism is legendary. Michael Denning describes the impact of Burke's remarks:

The story became a representative anecdote because of the larger dramatic reversal: before the year was out, Burke's "populist" heresy, his call for a politics around the symbol of the "people," became orthodoxy, as the Communist left adopted the strategy of the popular front. (443)

Burke's remarks were prescient, and, having the added appeal of being offered "tentatively," they called for a new direction at a conference that was largely centered around paradigms of class. Burke emphasized the point that, in contrast to the prevalent base-superstructure causality of dialectical materialism, ideas were not simply reflections of material conditions. Rather, ideas and myths have their own reality. In the last few decades, critics revisiting Burke have revived him as an underappreciated critical resource, recognizing him as "doing something like New Left analysis within the anti-intellectualist, Second International intellectual context of the old left"(Lentricchia 23).

Such attention to Burke is worthwhile, but the recognition of Burke as our early contemporary can lead to a false perception of his audience. In many respects, Burke was offering nothing new. Frank Lentricchia praises Burke's intervention at the conference: "Burke is saying: get yourself a dialectical rhetoric and fashion it out of the stuff of the history and culture in which you find yourselves; in this way you will have the chance to be understood, clearly understood"(33). Citing his "profound appeal to dialectics,"
Lentricchia claims that Burke was "doing Gramsci's work before anyone but Gramsci (and his censors) could read what would be called the Prison Notebooks" (33, 37). These remarks overemphasize and exaggerate the newness of Burke's remarks. Writers were already engaged in the careful consideration of how best to present politically progressive ideas to a mass audience. The dialectic was already a prominent critical tool; no issue was more discussed at the conference. To admonish an audience of not only New Masses editors and journalists, but also fiction writers and poets, as well as philosophers and critics, that they needed to be more attentive to the reality of symbols strikes me as condescending at best, and at worse as uninformed of the diverse nature of leftist fiction that had been produced in the early years of the Depression.

Burke's paper, along with Edwin Seaver's paper on proletarian fiction, generated the most discussion at the conference. Many attending writers vehemently disagreed with his suggestions, ostracizing Burke to the point that he would later describe hallucinations of "excrement . . . dripping from my tongue" (qtd. Lentricchia 21). Allen Porter pointed out that "the word 'people' is historically associated with demagoguery of the most vicious sort" (Hart 167). Friedrich Wolf called Burke's suggestion, among other things, "un-Marxian" (168). Joseph Freeman, an editor of the New Masses, responded harshest to Burke's suggestion, and accused Burke of acting on his anxiety of irrelevance as a bourgeois intellectual. "But he need not fear," said Freeman, patronizingly: "The proletarian takes over all that is best in the old culture" (170). As a New Masses editor well-known for his class-based editorial criteria, Freeman was exactly the type of leftist intellectual that Burke had in mind when he spoke against narrowly-defined criteria for
workerly fiction. But there were also many writers in the audience who must have winced
at Burke's characterization of their work as anti-intellectualist and semi-obscurantist.

James Farrell, who had just finished his *Studs Lonigan* trilogy (1932-35), was in
the audience. He recalled the session in his 1952 novel-memoir *Yet Other Waters*, in
which Bernard Carr, author of *Paddy Stanton*, attends a paper by John Keefe, "a chunky
little man with an esoteric critical reputation" (Farrell 123). Carr finds Keefe's remarks
"involved and obscure," and deems his call for a people's literature to be "totally wrong in
trying to approach the problems of literature in terms of slogans" (123). Carr is surprised
when Jake, the fictional representative of Joseph Freeman, responds with passion: "Is this
a Marxist slogan? No! Could Lenin have supported this slogan? No! No!" (124). As
recalled from the fifties, the 1935 AWC was a hotbed of political maneuvering by
opportunistic leaders, and was a depressing failure from Bernard Carr's perspective, with
any chance for rational expression of ideas thwarted by partisan politics and factionalism.
The papers presented strike Carr as "hastily-written" with "too many glittering Marxist
abstractions being hurled about" (119). The opportunism and self-delusion that Farrell saw
in the ranks of the League of American Writers is satirized in portraits of all the leading
intellectuals at the conference.

Farrell's description of the AWC from the perspective of an alienated writer
precisely illustrates the paradoxes and conflicts that arise when a political movement
evolves from a critical, negative endeavor to a movement with its own materiality,
demanding not only critique but policies and positive proposals. The discourses
surrounding cultural production that were presented at the AWC are enclosed and
reinscribed within Farrell's novel. Their ostensible objectivity is undermined by
depictions of writers being manipulated by the conference leaders. In response to the conference's slogan "Art is a weapon," Carr realizes "Not art but writers are the weapons here"(100). In a sense, Farrell's fictional reaction to the AWC is a deployment of ideological critique against the conference. The novel allows us to view the after-hours politics that are invisible within the official records of the conference proceedings. In one scene, as Bernard sips scotch in a Manhattan living room, he receives a Hegelian barb:

"Carr, did you write your speech with Hegel's aid?"
Sherman Scott asked Bernard.
"There's no call for a reference to Hegel in my paper,"
Bernard answered.

But Sherman Scott looked off, not even hearing Bernard's answer. Realizing Sherman had intended his remark as an insult, Bernard flushed with anger, but said nothing. (97-8)

In the planning sessions and behind-the-scenes meetings surrounding the conference, nothing could be less relevant that the specificities of Hegelian philosophy.

Through the tropes of fiction, Farrell is able to show the degree to which conference attendees were relying on party doctrine as a source of "revolutionary" hope and faith. In his characterization of Don Jones, a rank-and-file attendee at the conference, Farrell encases the objectivist discourses of Marxist doctrine within the subjective structures of an inner monologue:

Recalling his doubts, he felt guilty. If he had not stilled and quieted his misgivings and seen the truth, he wouldn't be here, an important figure at this Congress. He'd be alone, out in the cold now, with his revolutionary career wrecked. Never again would he allow his loyalty to the Movement to be shaken. Never! What weakness in him had led him to lose faith? But he had overcome his doubts, and his faith was now stronger and firmer than it had ever been. He'd come to understand that blood was the test of a Bolshevik. Now he believed that he was truly a hardened Bolshevik. If
Lenin were alive, he could look Comrade Vladimir Ilyitch straight in the eye and say he would believe and follow to the end. Looking about at the writers and intellectuals, he thought of how many were still soft and not to be fully trusted. This Congress would help Bolshevize the best of the American intellectuals. The weak ones would only be useful transitional intellectuals, and if they didn't meet the test, they could be dropped in the dustbin of history. (114)

This passage moves inward by way of free indirect discourse, at first describing Jones from the third-person perspective, then dropping the pronoun "he" and speaking more directly in untagged monologue, with linguistic markers separating author and character removed. From this inner perspective, with intentions and personal anxieties laid bare, Farrell explores the affective implications of the conference's doctrinaire Marxism. Jones's identification with the Communists is shown to be based on a self-conscious religiosity, genuflecting at the alter--or tomb--of Lenin.

While Burke's remarks at the conference can be described as Gramscian insofar as they "check the degree of realism and practicability of the various ideologies which have been borne,"(Gramsci 19) they reassert the subjective pole of the long-standing philosophical struggle between determinism and voluntarism, admonishing writers to do what they had already been doing. If we are looking for an American Gramsci, a better match might be a novelist. Farrell's study, in Yet Other Waters, of the consciousnesses of the various attendees of the conference, from the unanimous party followers to the ambitious, political leaders, provides a dramatic instance of Gramscian critique. By evoking the ways that objectivist discourses only possess meaning within the structures of subjectivity, Farrell's narrative exists as a discursive remainder, resisting the centripetal
pull towards integration into the rational, ideological systems of thought that are necessary for any political party.

Gramsci's writings in the *Prison Notebooks* describe how any understanding of the role of intellectuals in class struggle must take into account "the ensemble of the system of relations in which these activities (and therefore the intellectual groups which personify them) have their place within the general complex of social relations"(8). No specific formula or approach will apply to all contexts; rather, each nation must be taken into account in its own cultural and juridical/legal specificities. Gramsci likens the challenges confronted by a political party to those of Machiavelli's Prince, whom he cites respectfully as the first modern Jacobin. What parties need is not ideology, he claims, which carries a tendency to absorb the specific struggles of the present into generalizing patterns from the past, but rather a theory of praxis--an action plan--that addresses the specific power struggles being waged within the superstructure. Gramsci takes pains to emphasize that the struggle is not based in the Hegelian dialectic between self and world, which he dismisses in Croce's phenomenal "dialectic of distincts," but specifically in the superstructural sector of the base-superstructure model of scientific Marxism that was embraced by Lenin and later Soviet theorists(137). Gramsci wrote:

> In a philosophy of praxis, the distinction will certainly not be between the moments of the absolute Spirit, but between the levels of the superstructure. The problem will therefore be that of establishing the dialectic position of political activity (and of the corresponding science) as a particular level of the superstructure. (137)

By limiting the dialectic process to the superstructure, Gramsci's dialectical materialism avoids reproducing the mechanistic, deterministic tendencies that were apparent in
Stalinist interpretations. Instead, Gramsci's theory calls for a liberatory ideology that is fluent in mass cultural discourses, the "moralising sermons, emotional stimuli, and messianic myths" of modern hegemony (150).

A question that arises for political movements in light of Gramsci's proposals is the degree to which one can adopt the language of the dominant hegemony without sacrificing the critical perspective of the political party. This question is answered in Farrell's account of the AWC, as Bernard Carr witnesses incongruities between the party's radical goals and their symbols, which are often used in such a way that they do not serve the party goals but rather distract and placate, diverting attention from more pressing issues. The primacy of the Soviet Union at the conference strikes Carr as just such an instance. "Why do the oppressed workers of the world say so much about the Soviet Union and so little about their own oppression?" Carr wonders (107). He resists the conference's internationalist focus on the grounds that it diverts attention from the class struggle within the United States.

The conference was a moment in the history of literary leftism when critics made crucial progress on aspects of ideological critique, articulating through objectivist discourses issues which were already implicit in the literary culture. Burke's remarks, if somewhat redundant, were prescient regarding the challenges that leftists faced as they tried to express their rational objections to a mass audience within a public sphere whose non-rationality was increasingly undeniable. As the country moved closer to World War Two, images of an American people became increasingly prevalent. The new overtures being made to the mainstream by the left did not sit well with Sidney Hook. He wrote:
A socialist who calls for the formation of a Popular Front cannot do so without in effect surrendering his socialism, no matter what he says in his heart... A Socialist who supports a Popular Front government may find that as a result of its program of defense of capitalism, it may open the gates to the Fascists. (qtd. Denning 432)

As the Soviet Comintern implemented its Popular Front strategies internationally, the American communists and their intellectual fellow travelers took up a rhetoric of the people which was aimed at appealing not to a specific class but to the nation as a whole. But the adjustment in tactics brought with it reconciliations which, Hook feared, might alter the political movement's identity. Mussolini, in Italy, had begun as a Marxist, only to later align himself with the Catholic church and the country's conservative business interests in the name of merging socialism with pragmatism, which was the same goal which Hook had himself tried to formulate in philosophy.

Marxism and fascism share some common ground. Both engage models of a collective consciousness that defy the paradigms of individuality emphasized by liberals and conservatives. But socialism connects that consciousness to the economic, theorizing about the possibilities for collectivity within the bounds of economic change. Fascism, on the other hand, maintains the present economic relations, disconnecting the mass rhetoric from real change. Walter Benjamin, in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," wrote:

Fascism attempts to organize the newly created proletarian masses without affecting the property structure which the masses strive to eliminate. Fascism sees its salvation in giving these masses not their right, but instead a chance to express themselves. The masses have a right to change property relations; Fascism seeks to give them an expression while preserving property. The logical result of
Fascism is the introduction of aesthetics into political life.  
(Benjamin 241)

The aestheticization of politics Benjamin described is evident in the symbols of Italian and German fascism, combining pre-modern, racist legends of an historical homeland with a veneration of modern technological and military power. Benjamin argued that in the absence of the collectivization of property the inevitable outcome of the aestheticization of politics was war. No other cause could unite the people and also provide demand for the nation's massive technological apparatus. The dialectician's response to this political shift gets the last word in Benjamin's essay: "Communism responds by politicizing art"(242).

The individualism of classic liberalism has made the United States resistant to the spread of fascism. American antistatism has made the country less susceptible to the hero-worship and communal/national sense of Spirit that defined it elsewhere. There were fascist movements in the United States during the Thirties, but their influence was relatively small and short-lived. America's racial and cultural heterogeneity proved inhospitable to the strong nationalism of fascism, which often made its appeals in racist terms. The culture of the Popular Front took part in the celebration of American diversity that redressed threats of fascism. Michael Denning describes Popular Front populism as, among other things "an anti-racist ethnic pluralism imagining the United States as a 'nation of nations.'"(Denning 125). Refuting New Left characterizations of Popular Front culture as "sentimentally liberal and pro-'little people,'" he describes the movement's cultural production as a "paradoxical synthesis of competing nationalisms and
internationalism—pride in ethnic heritage and identity combined with an assertive Americanness and a popular internationalism"(130).

Denning takes pains in The Cultural Front to emphasize the mistake of underestimating the real progressiveness of Popular Front works. He challenges the division emphasized by Barbara Foley and others between the early half of the decade's Third Period culture and the later half of the decade's Popular Front culture. Denning argues that the culture of both halves, in fact the leftist culture from 1929 until the late forties—the "Age of the CIO"(Congress of International Organizations)—has more continuity than disruptions. It is clear that, for too long, the works of the Popular Front have been denigrated and ignored, grouped into simplistic periods and sub-genres. But Barbara Foley's Radical Representations makes the case, extensively, for a distinction between the two periods of Thirties leftism. The Popular Front policy had a profound effect on the overall direction of the Communist Party. After Roosevelt's overwhelming re-election in 1936, he was able to successfully incorporate both the rhetoric and the organizers of leftist third party organizations in Minnesota, New York, and Wisconsin. Instead of resisting Roosevelt's co-optation and eventual disarming of leftist demands, Popular Front communists aligned themselves with the Democratic party and replaced their critique of capitalist economic oppression with an integrationist populism.

Populism is an essential aspect of preparation for war. Gramsci describes global war as the inevitable end-result of overproducing capitalism. Where an unequal class structure limits consumption within the country, capitalism must expand its markets through imperialism and war. Such a system needs a hegemonic populism grand enough in its imagery to motivate the masses to fight. As the United States geared towards entry
in World War Two, there was a clear need for cohesion and unity among the population, and the literary production of the left during these years cannot be considered without taking into account the conservative, normative function it played in that mobilization. In *The Poetics of Fascism*, Paul Morrison challenges the democratic theamtics that many have found in the novel genre. He writes:

> the contention that the novel is all generosity and accommodation, definable only in its resistance to definition, is itself the most compelling evidence of its bourgeois investments, of its collusion with the class that does not want to be named, or that would be known only in its resistance to nomination or definition. The genre-that-is-not-one, the aesthetic dispensation that eludes ideological determination merely returns to the class-that-is-not-one, the political settlement that embraces and enfolds all, an idealized image of its own infinitely plural self. To speak "somewhat paradoxically," in the manner of Žižek: the celebration of "open form" easily comes to underwrite a perfectly closed economy. (Morrison 14)

Morrison's challenge to the universality of fiction's often-asserted ethos of democracy shows the limits of a national culture that erases its own relativity in the multi-ethnic "nation of nations" described by Denning.

From the turmoil of the labor struggles and police actions, to the economic hardship of the Depression and the fearful preparations for World War Two, the Thirties was a period of ideological crisis. The vibrant dialogue between critics and writers, and the dual roles that many leftist intellectuals played, surrounded the narrative genre with a panoply of commentary and critique than transcribed the ideas presented in literature into objectivist reassertions. The social realism of the Third Period had stumbled upon the idealizing shortcomings of workerism. But the more conventional potential symbols of
social unity—the family, the small-town community, and the nation—also seemed tainted by and invested in the capitalist system.

As the mass cultural industry increased in power and influence, the critical conversation surrounding novels shifted from one which located leftist fiction between modernity and social realism, to one which located it between modernity and mass culture. Perhaps the most revealing proof of the crisis that took place in the culture of literary leftism at the close of the decade is found in the fact that recent critics' theorizations of the period have focused their analysis not on the novel specifically, but rather on the larger trends of American culture. Looking at the jazz culture, the movies, the theater projects, and the mass icons, the inroads of leftism can be discerned throughout all aspects of the nation's culture, from Orson Welles' *Citizen Kane*, to Paul Robeson's "Ballad for Americans," to the spoofing comedy of Charlie Chaplin, contorting his body within the gears of industrial capitalism.

Many of the Hegelian interlocutors of the earlier part of the decade were, as soon as the early forties, on their way towards conservative apostasies. Sidney Hook would eventually dine with Reagan in the White House. The academic adoption of the tenets of the New Criticism that arose during the forties refocused criticism on canonical poetry and works from earlier centuries, and the passionate discussions of the dialectics of proletarian literature faded into history. But throughout these changes in critical discourse, the novel remained poised between its realist appraisals of the deterministic aspects of the present in dialogue with the subjectivist aspects of consciousness and the possibilities of finding a realm of freedom within the limiting structures of capitalism.
Recent leftist debates have continued to negotiate between positions of scientific versus critical Marxism. The structuralism of Louis Althusser has reemphasized the deterministic aspects of state control in all aspects of the superstructure. Jean Baudrillard has focused on the ways that the very logic of exchange and the commodity form is itself ideological, a line of thought that traces back to the later, scientific Marxism of *Capital*. Both French critics take a scientific approach to Marxism that sees little chance of escaping what has been called the "prison-house of language." Critical Marxism has been recently emphasized in Slavoj Žižek's *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, which attempts "to reactualize Hegelian dialectics by giving it a new reading of the basis of Lacanian psychoanalysis"(7). In opposition to those who view our times as "post-ideological," Žižek formulates ideology at the level of social representation. Ideology asserts itself as a totalizing representation of reality, indistinguishable from reality. The way to approach ideology is not reason, since any rational argument will be integrated into a successfully-instilled ideology. Rather, what is required is a sense that our understanding of the world is deeply integrated with a nothingness beyond our interpretations which influences and figures our totalizing theories of existence.

Žižek defines modern subjectivity as self-referential negativity, by which he means that the subject is experienced as that which eludes classification within the categories of rational thought. He defines it as a discursive leftover of dialectics, the "nothing of absolute negativity"(119). Žižek's equation of subjectivity with radical negativity corroborates the praise of negative thought put forth in Herbert Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man*. Marcuse diagnosed modern society as one-dimensional, under the sway of a "totalitarian universe of technological rationality" that has eliminated the voices
of dissent to produce an uncritical veneration of science (123). What is lost is the critical power of negative thinking. He writes:

In the equation Reason = Truth = Reality, which joins the subjective and objective world into one antagonistic unity, Reason is the subversive power, the "power of the negative" that establishes, as theoretical and practical Reason, the truth for men and things--that is, the conditions in which men and things become what they really are. (123)

This formulation describes the ideological value of literature as a genre that has remained, through changes over the century in politics and philosophy, as an assertion of the perpetual rootedness of all theories and belief-systems in a consciousness that is not definable solely within the constrictions of rational thought.

In response to the scientific determinism of the Third International, as well as to Burke's call for a more "positive" symbol for the Popular Front left, these most recent articulations of Hegelian critical practice redress the populist symbolism advocated by Popular Front leftists. Rather than take up already commodified forms and types--the tropes of "the People"--fiction is at its best when it is finding new forms and languages to understand the hidden perspectives and untold stories of modernity. In retrospect, Burke's call for a revolutionary symbolism that adapted established types and patterns towards leftist ends seems to misdirect the fictional imagination away from what Waldo Frank called "the dialectic of the artist," and towards the standardized representations whose power would only gain in the years following the Second World War. While it seems inevitable that fiction engages a range of collective types that naturalize and reify life under capitalism, the most interesting works are the ones that thwart and challenge the logic of these types, not works that cater to them.
Chapter Two
Identity and Ideology:
Recovering the Marxism of Depression-Era Proletarian Fiction

While the literary criticism produced by literary leftists during the Thirties
remained within paradigms of scientific Marxism, the literary output of the decade was
less deterministic. Even the most doctrinaire Communists reconsidered and questioned
their philosophical views once they start exploring those ideas through fiction. Max
Eastman, the avowedly scientific, communist editor of the New Masses, broke from the
imperatives of his editorials in Venture, his 1929 novel that unorthodoxically focused on
revolutionary stirrings not among the proletariat, but rather among the petit bourgeoisie of
Greenwich Village. Portrayals of human behavior in works of Depression-era literary
leftism evolve and change through a dialectic of ideology and identity, understanding
society alternatively as false consciousness or consciousness, as either a contaminated set
of illegitimate cultural myths that only functioned to control subjects, or as the means of
expressing human ideals that could transcend differences of class through an appeal based
on the universal aspects of human consciousness. In the first case, ideology, human
behavior was interpreted as ideological in the sense that it was regarded as a naturalized
set of conventions that appeared to bestow individual autonomy while secretly enslaving
its adherents. In the second case, identitarian fiction, human behavior was not so much
interpreted as essentialized. This mode did not attempt to transcend human behavior by
contextualizing it within rational arguments explaining its instrumental role in
perpetuating capitalism. Rather, it emphasized the transcendent aspects of human
subjectivity, using humanist symbols and strategies that affirmed identity.
Ideology denotes the diagnosis of society made by the philosophical practice of
ideological critique, the critical theory articulated in the early works of Marx and Engels.
According to this view, ideology—the normative, naturalized elements of social reality—
can be disarmed through critique. Although the terms of this argument vary historically,
there are common threads connecting a long tradition of critics and writers who have
attacked ideology. Firstly, they assert that subjectivity is to some degree a construct that
perpetuates the interests of the dominant group by passing their interests off as natural
and inevitable. Secondly, these critics and writers assume that they can express a rational
critique of that subjectivity which can diagnose its symptomatic blindness.

Identity denotes the view that is centrally focused on the human subject as a social
being. Identitarian literature searches for humanist connections between disparate cultures
and historical moments, although it appears more often as a modality than a genre. The
variety of means by which identity can be formulated shows the malleability—indeed, the
inescapability—of identity as the central concern of literature. Some works, such as the
poetry of T.S. Eliot, seek these connections through engaging earlier cultural movements,
such as Romanticism or Classicism. Twentieth-century fiction and poetry, with its
innovations in multiple perspectives and layered storytelling, formulates identity
intersubjectively, evoking the psychological processes of identity and Othering as central
to self-understanding. The humanist themes of identitarian fiction bring with them an
erasure of the mediated nature of the reality through which they express these themes.
Certain aspect of identity thus become universalized in works that emphasize life, death,
and reproduction as central aspects of all human life, naturalized by the cyclical
symbolism of seasonal change in nature. This view of identity brings with it a strong investment in the self as the determining structure of modern human consciousness. It is suspicious of rationality and, instead, calls for a constant renewal of experience. According to this paradigm, nearly all of human behavior is explained not by rational critique, but by observation of and fidelity to reality. Rational critique, in such a model, is in no position to condescend on other social phenomena, such as familial hierarchies, community relations, kinship rituals, or political beliefs, but rather is, like them, delimited and defined within structures of identity.

Approaching the leftist literature of the Thirties, the opposition between ideology and identity first appears in the later critical generalization that characterized the literary output of Thirties leftists as ideological in the sense that the works are too blinkered by their own partisan political goals to attain the objectivity necessary for genuine art. In a self-contradictory accusation, leftist fiction has been criticized for both its partisan bias and its naïve realism. Caren Irr summarizes the nature of the accusation:

According to narratologists, ideological fiction is characterized by a redundancy at this juncture [between narrative voice and events narrated]; the narrator validates certain politically correct sentiments voiced by particular characters or insists on a corrective interpretation of events depicted. Thus, a closed monologic world is created which allows no space for a dialogue of voices or a discrepancy between points of view or a multiplicity of political vocabularies. In this view, the proletarian novel denies the potential of art by collapsing the open-endedness of social reality. (Irr 115)

Thirties leftist works are ideological, but not in this debased, accusatory definition. They are, rather, ideological insofar as they attempt to understand and critique subjectivity
using Enlightenment discourses of reason and historical materialism. A quick perusal of novels from the Thirties can dispel the accusations of monologism and didacticism. In a body of works too varied and rich to simply dismiss, from the proto-feminist activism of Agnes Smedley to the mass-cultural appeals of John Steinbeck and the surreal experimentation of Nathanael West, Thirties literary leftism is too diverse in form and style for the above dismissals to hold true.

Insofar as Thirties leftist literature critiques subjectivity using ideology, it is at odds with an idea that is at the heart of the American identity: that of an autonomous, independent selfhood capable of endless adaptation and generational re-invention. Ideological theories are at odds with the idea of the autonomous self insofar as such theories propose that self-fashioning is more easily asserted than achieved. Theories of ideology posit the ability of reason to achieve accurate, objective understandings of the past as well as the present. In a society that privileges lived experience over rational analysis, the truth claims of ideological critique are dismissed as hiding ulterior, partisan interests. Such theories pose a serious threat to the values of freedom and self-determination central to the national identity. Ideology and identity are key terms for understanding why Thirties literary leftism has been relegated to the simplistic and dismissive categorization of "proletarian fiction" because they convey the philosophical conflict between Marxist critique and the American sense of self.

Throughout the history of the reception of Thirties leftist fiction, critics have drawn a contrast between the literary works, which are accused of being programmed, and the citizen-individual, who will not be programmed. Arthur Schlesinger's The Vital
Center (1949) was one of the first attempts to look back at the decade's left turn. Equating progressivism with totalitarianism, Schlesinger argued that communism destroyed private instincts and repressed natural human aggression. During the cold war, proletarian fiction epitomized the worse of literature for both the Humanists and the New Critics. In their book The American Communist Party: A Critical History (1957), Irving Howe and Paul Coser described American communist writers as pawns of Soviet control.

A symptomatic example of the self-contradicting nature of cold war critical studies can be found in Walter Rideout's 1956 The Radical Novel in the United States, 1900-1954. Rideout's interpretations of Thirties and forties leftist fiction hinge on a dichotomy between "a certain ideology with art" versus an individualized definition of freedom and truthfulness(3). In Rideout's analysis, ideological forces are characterized as threats against individuality and autonomous reason. "Because of their acceptance of the Marxist dialectic," he writes, "they [the proletarian writers] conceived what ought to be as what would be"(220). Despite the influence of ideology, however, Rideout claims that leftist literature is comprised not "of ideas but of attitudes," thus accusing literary leftist works of being simultaneously too ideological and not ideological enough(203).

In a bitter twist, Cold War-era literary critics and historians have held Marxist thought culpable, along with the Soviet states that were testing it, of totalitarianism. This is ironic, insofar as Marxist critique always inquired into the degree to which any self-proclaimed free society impeded the freedom of its citizens. Rideout's accusations of totalitarianism corroborate American foreign policy of the era, accusing the Soviet Other of a condition which was actually pervasive in the United States: a totality which dictated
individual behavior within strict norms and expectations. The worse result of Rideout's characterization of socialism as totalitarian is the claim that any American interest in communism was based on its ability to engineer society(138). This accusation, so central to the construction of the sustaining American myth of an "open society," reflects an increasingly paranoid nationalism as well as a set of anxieties about the rationalization and social engineering taking place within the United States. Rideout overestimates the influence of the Soviet Union in the communist movements that arose in America, and underestimates the degree to which those movements were indigenous movements within the United States.

Daniel Aaron's 1961 *Writers on the Left: Odysseys in American Literary Communism* is the first study to depart from the nationalist distortions so pervasive in earlier accounts of the Thirties. Aaron departs from Rideout's understanding of the movement as a Soviet cultural invasion, instead recognizing it as the resurfacing of the nineteenth-century American literary tendency to be "hortatory and didactic"(3). Aaron's book set forth a series of documentary portrayals that are still considered essential history for the decade. He understands the leftist of the Thirties to be the conclusion of a trajectory of rebellion that began as a philosophical movement in the first twenty years of the century, and then evolved into a social critique.

Even after the birth of the New Left movements of the sixties, Thirties novels continued to be ignored and dismissed. Sixties leftism had little in common with the modernist socialism of the Thirties. The leftism that gained momentum during the Civil Rights Movement and the anti-Vietnam War movement brought with it a cultural
revolution that waged its critique on the level of lifestyle, especially sexual norms. The patriotism and sexual conservatism of Thirties leftism made it unrehabilitable for the New Left. While some aspects of working-class culture were revived, much of the literary legacy remained unrecovered. In the United States, the sixties was more a cultural revolution than a Marxist one. The truly valiant moments of sixties resistance--civil rights activism and free-speech-driven direct action on college campuses--are dwarfed, in history, by the larger, less political, cultural movement. Thomas Frank, in *The Conquest of Cool*, writes:

> From a distance of thirty years, [the sixties' counterculture's] language and music seem anything but the authentic populist culture they yearned so desperately to be: from contrived cursing to saintly communalism to the embarrassingly faked Woody Guthrie accents of Bob Dylan and to the astoundingly pretentious works of groups like Iron Butterfly and the Doors, the relics of the counterculture reek of affectation and phoniness, the leisure-dreams of white suburban children. (Frank 8)

In an age in which many saw sexual liberation as a gateway to political disillusionment, the non-sexual admonitions of Thirties leftism seemed staunch and uninspiring.

Although Aaron's work was groundbreaking in many respects, it has been critiqued by more recent studies as limited by its focus on New York City as the center of resistance, at the expense of the many other smaller regional projects. Cary Nelson's *Repression and Recovery* (1989), full of inspirational illustrations of Thirties poetry as it originally appeared in the decade's ephemeral regional journals, supplements Aaron's history. Nelson's recognition of the influence of modernism in both the language, and, strikingly, the innovative layout of the poems, redresses the critical truism that leftism
was a separate aesthetic that defied literary modernism. This point is further developed in Andreas Huyssen's *After the Great Divide*, which likewise argues that our more recent interpretations of the avant-garde of the earlier part of the century have not sufficiently recognized the leftist critique that informed that movement.

In *Labor and Desire* (1991), Paula Rabinowitz reconstructs the erased subjectivity of women from the leftist literary culture of the Depression. Women are invisible in much Thirties culture, Rabinowitz explains, because the left was unable to perceive the specificity of gender as a political category in and of itself. Instead, writers used gender as a metaphor for class relations. Leftist fiction, with its typically virile, masculine workers, effeminate bourgeois intellectuals, and nurturing communist mothers, used gender to create a narrative of labor, but the gendering of class simplified the left's understanding of the conflict between fields of class and gender, and led them to ignore the importance of desire. Barbara Foley's *Radical Representations* (1993) argues that a pervasive anti-Stalinism has distorted interpretations of Thirties literary leftism. She traces this vilification back to Arthur Schlesinger's simplistic description of American leftist writers as dupes of the Moscow Comintern. Later critics unquestionably adapted Schlesinger's model of a hardcore center of cynical, controlling ideologues disseminating aesthetic policy to their obsequious minions.

In *The Cultural Front*, Michael Denning brings historical materialist analysis to bear on the Popular Front culture of the "age of the CIO" (Congress of Industrial Organizations), a period that spans 1935-1959 (Denning xviii). Rather than seeing it as a core-periphery model in which Communist party leaders influenced American
intellectuals, Denning views the rise in mass-cultural leftism during the Thirties as part of a historical bloc that started with the CIO and spread through the superstructures of politics and culture. He calls this phenomenon a "laboring of American culture" by which he means:

1. The rhetoric of labor was pervasive during the period.
2. As immigrant families matured, the number of working-class Americans involved in the culture industries increased.
3. Unionization made the labor processes involved in cultural production more visible.
4. American culture turned social democratic, more akin to Britain's post-World War Two "labourism" than the liberalism and populism of the New Deal.
5. Like a child-bearing mother, America labored and birthed a new culture during this renaissance-like period. (xvi)

Denning's history emphasizes a hard lesson: the rise of leftist thought during the Thirties was not the result of a voluntary alliance between disparate classes. Rather, it was the superstructural by-product of developments that took place within the economic base. As capitalism expanded its influence, it demanded a regulated nationwide labor pool. The leftism of the Popular Front era, Denning argues, was the result of the consolidation that ensued.

All of these revisionary studies of the Thirties have emphasized the degree to which American Marxism has been misrepresented by earlier critics who responded
defensively against a perceived "red menace," a threat that had always been formulated as originating outside the nation. The dismissive nature of these earlier studies can be understood as defenses of an exceptionalist conception of national identity. Ever since the earliest, sixteenth-century manifestations, American literature has contributed to the creation of a national identity rooted in an individualism defined by its ability to adapt. The pragmatism that has accompanied this national identity has always defined itself in opposition to any systemic rational critique.

One of the first articulations of American selfhood is found in the Romanticist essays of Ralph Waldo Emerson. Emerson asserted the importance of turning away from the past of Europe, to embrace the "aboriginal Self" in the present (Emerson "Self-Reliance" 37). This self is not to be found in books or the study of history. Rather, it is found in the everyday interactions of man and nature, a concept which, in Emerson's usage, includes society. Emerson claimed that it was through social interaction that one comes to know oneself, and it was through knowing oneself that one could come to understand the rest of the world, and the nature of humanity.

The material description of selfhood is accompanied by an inward formulation. Similar to the British Romantic notion of a Spirit that connects all life, Emerson wrote of an Over-soul, his poeticized version of the Hegelian Geist, a universal human essence which was found within all people:

Under all this running sea of circumstance, whose waters ebb and flow with perfect balance, lies the aboriginal abyss of real Being. Essence, or God, is not a relation, or a part, but the whole. Being is the vast affirmative, excluding negation, self-balanced, and swallowing up all relations, parts, and times, within itself. ("Compensation" 70)
Each individual is different, Emerson maintained, and no route to the within was the same, but by discovering one's "authentic" inner self, one connects with the rest of humanity, a group that, "underneath their external diversities . . . are of one heart and mind" ("Prudence" 141). For Emerson, the knowledge that one discovers by turning inward is universal, the same for all insofar as all are delimited by a shared set of natural and physical constraints that inevitably accompany the human condition. Regardless of station or epoch, all have a finite amount of time, "seventy salads long," in which to live ("Nature" 331).

For Emerson, the self is always in a state of becoming, progressing through interactions with Nature, as found in others. In many of his essays, Emerson portrays selfhood as beyond any fixed representation. In The Renewal of Literature, Richard Poirier writes: "The self in Emerson is not an entity, not even a function; it is an intimation of a presence, and it comes upon us out of the very act by which the self tries to elude definition" (4). Emerson's definition of selfhood is performative: it is realized through action. He wrote: "Do your work, and I shall know you. Do your work, and you shall reinforce yourself" ("Self-Reliance" 32). Despite his formulation of a transcending Over-soul connecting all, this Over-soul is only accessible through the conduit of the self. The orientation towards action and performativity in Emerson's writing brings with it a suspicion of history and books. Emerson's strong faith in intuition and unreflected being make his sense of self a strong endorsement of identity.

It is hard to overestimate the primacy of the atomic self in American fiction. From the colossal, obsessive self of Captain Ahab in Melville's Moby Dick to the ghostly selves
of the fiction of Hawthorne and Poe, to the "Song of Myself" of Walt Whitman, American literature of the nineteenth century developed and plumbed the depths of the self. Turn-of-the-century America faced a new set of historical conditions. In the wake of the unsettling of rural life that the Industrial Revolution had brought, a new era of modernity began. Although the modern era is dated as far back as the seventeenth century, the term was not invented until the late nineteenth century. Historians during that period traced the beginning of the era back to the Italian Renaissance. Although controversy and dissent will cluster around any definition of the concept of modernity, it can be defined in most general terms as the replacement of traditional forms of life by new systems of social organization. The new systems of modernity brought a sense of decline and a falling away from earlier beliefs and hierarchies. In pre-industrial society, values and beliefs were largely the product of who one was, where one lived, and how one was brought up: if everyone in your village believed in the Chain of Being, you would likely follow suit. Moderns, on the other hand, rejected the political, social, and metaphysical hierarchies of the Ancien Régime. With the increased interaction between nations that came as capitalism developed globally, the traditional social structures of village and family life were replaced by a mechanized, urban society. Within the conditions of modern life, the old means of relatively unproblematic identity formation vanished.

Modernism, in broadest terms, is the panoply of scientific, psychological, and aesthetic theories that arose from the conditions of modernity, and that attempted to explain and interrogate it. Literary modernism, like modernity, is difficult to delimit
chronologically, but Proust's *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu* is often cited as the first modernist novel. Proust created a new style of narrative that abandoned the realism of the nineteenth century and redirected the novelistic imagination, creating narrative structured by memory and the subject's stream-of-consciousness rather than by building plot around the events and patterns of social life.

Frank Kermode has distinguished between what he calls paleomodernism and neomodernism. The former group denotes the early, original modernists, including James Joyce, T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, and W.B. Yeats. Paleomodernists perceived their modernist writing to be the culmination of the entire modern era. They treated the crisis of their fragmented present by turning back to antiquity. Neomodernism developed during the same period, although its influence was not felt until after World War Two. This group, which included Gertrude Stein, Virginia Woolf, and William Carlos Williams, reacted against the classicism of the paleomodernists, and redressed the difficulty of their recondite, allusive writing with a new style of simplicity and directness.

Leftist writers of the Thirties faced a literary field that was dominated by paleomodernism. In the prosperous twenties, humanism had gained a large American readership among the middle and upper classes. Daniel Aaron summarizes the degree to which humanism conflicted with the Left: "Denying the importance of external forces and insisting upon the autonomy of the individual, humanism of necessity was anticollectivist"(Aaron 237). By the Thirties, Humanism's influence subsided. Paleomodernism replaced it as the high culture that one was most likely to find on the shelves of the well-read. Works such as *Ulysses*, *The Waste Land*, and the poetry of Yeats
were considered masterpieces of modernist literature. Paleomodernism constituted a body of work that, like humanism in the twenties, provided a rival discourse with which the Left engaged. In particular, Thirties leftists reacted against the belief in the idea of human nature.

In their reaction against essentializing definitions of human nature, many leftist writers of the Thirties were led to challenge not only the notion of a historically-transcendent subject, but, even further, the very notion of the existence of any concept of fixed identity. Leftist authors created narratives that attempted, in various ways, to disrupt and challenge identitarian discourses. Their attempts to unmask and disarm through description the naturalizing and universalizing tendencies of identity constituted a negative critique, but offered no positive alternative model to replace it. This explains the theoretical, conjectural nature of much of Thirties culture, as well as its typical inability to find closure. In *The Cultural Front*, Michael Denning writes that: "The ideological crisis of the depression was in part a crisis of narrative, an inability to imagine what had happened and what would happen next"(264). This is reflected in the philosophical tension that materialized in fiction between ideology and identity. Thirties narratives are rich when considered for their strength of theoretical possibility, but are less impressive when judged solely on their ability to chronicle accurately and realistically the experience of lived subjectivity under capitalism.

Works of Thirties literary leftism resist the novelistic convention of articulating the unconscious through experiments of language and form. Instead of conceiving of the human life span as a unifying form that transcends history, ideological works of literary
leftism view the family as an hegemonic component of a larger false consciousness that functions to transform the population into a docile, efficiently reproductive workforce. Wary of reproducing discourses of a universal set of human traits and experiences that transcend time, literary leftists suspend belief in the content of subjective experience in their work, and recontextualize human behavior as socially and culturally mediated responses to larger structural determinants. In a sense, this is a reflection of the conditions of their production. If Denning is right about the leftist culture of the Thirties--that it was not willed into existence by a class but was, rather, a by-product of consolidated developments in the economic infrastructure--then we can describe it as an instance of what Fredric Jameson describes as mechanistic causality, in which the economic base largely defines the cultural superstructure.¹ In other words, what seems to us now as a deterministic and formulaic theorization of cultural oppression is, given the historical context, an accurate critical diagnosis. As Rita Barnard has recently pointed out, the years between the wars were a time of mass culture, in contrast to our more recent age of popular culture. The distinction is crucial: mass culture implies a unidirectionality of meaning with tight institutional control of creative direction; popular culture reflects the more recent developments in mass media, most significantly the digital revolution in internet technology. Under the circumstances of the last several decades, new modes of consumption have made the forms of mass culture more susceptible to reappropriation

¹ In The Political Unconscious, Jameson takes pains to note that although this sort of causality has been surpassed by more sophisticated theories of social causality such as Leibnitzian expressive causality, or Althusserian “absent cause” causality, it can still have relevance in describing local causes, e.g. historical materialist explanations for cultural forms.
and resignification, thus calling for the distinction between modern mass culture and postmodern popular culture.

One of the values of Thirties literary leftism was its ability to inspire people to think of themselves as members of a community rather than as isolated individuals. As expressed by *New Masses* editor Joseph Freeman, it was through communism that "we replaced I, and to speak of your own life . . . was to speak of the life of mankind in whose development you found your undivided being" (qtd. Pells 165). Although many leftist authors have been characterized as hypocritically erasing their own middle-class status as they attempt to speak for the workers, this was not the case. The authors were well aware of their separate status, and produced texts that theorized the splits and distances existing between different social classes. Some work was self-reflective, and even occasionally solipsistically so, but it was counterbalanced by work that foregrounded coalitions across the boundaries of class.

The Popular Front era represents the culmination of this attempt to unite people, but the changes in strategy that come with this era seem, in retrospect, to be wrong turns for the leftist movement. Michael Denning describes the emergence, at mid-decade, of a paradoxical synthesis of competing nationalisms—pride in ethnic heritage and identity combined with an assertive Americanism—that might be called "ethnic Americanism."

. . . This combination created a potent ideological constellation, sustaining both the radical "cultural pluralism" of the left-wing Popular Front and the white ethnic nationalism that characterized the anti-Communist anti-capitalism of the CIO's right wing. (Denning 9)

In this new constellation, the combination produced a scrubbed-up version of "The People," a nativist evocation of nation identity that immigrants strove to emulate, which,
in spite of its diversity in terms of race and ethnicity, was in fact a hegemonic construction with many disturbingly conservative implications. This phenomenon gained momentum as the tensions leading up to World War Two continued to build. As news of Stalin's purges reached the United States, and Hitler's armies invaded Poland, the culture industry rallied to unite "The People." The brief spirit of a domestic unity against capitalist oppression then transforms from a class-based movement to a nationalistic one: Free America versus the threat of totalitarianism.

As discussed in Chapter One, an early manifestation of this turn towards a populism occurred during the first meeting of the American Writers Congress in 1935, when Kenneth Burke suggested "that we take 'the people' rather than 'the worker' as our basic symbol of exhortation and allegiance"(Hart 93). Burke's paper, "Revolutionary Symbolism in America," reflects the larger shift taking place in 1935 in the culture of the left. Burke asks "Is the symbol of the worker accurately attuned to us, as so conditioned by the reactionary forces in control of our main educational channels?"(Hart 89). The answer is a tentative no. Burke made an appeal beyond the vested interests of class, repeating Matthew Arnold's view of culture as a possible universal realm in which the distorting biases of class interests can be suspended. Burke critiqued the worker as a flawed symbol because it brought "negativity" and begged "sympathy" rather than inspiring enthusiasm(89). After all, Burke notes, "there are few people who really want to work, let us say, as a human cog in an automobile factory, or as gatherers of vegetables on a big truck farm"(89). Instead of focusing on class issues, Burke suggests that the radical writer "propagandize his cause by surrounding it with as full a cultural texture as he can
manage" (93). Burke's remarks evoke the conflict between ideology and identity that authors faced throughout the decade.

Historically, ideology has been a central concept of Marxist criticism. Since its early theorization by Marx and Engels, through its more recent developments in the hands of Slavoj Žižek, it has served as a useful means of theorizing the relationship of consciousness and rational thought to the control of social power. Most of the earlier theorizations of ideology raise as many issues as they resolve, and the term has proven itself to be susceptible to fallacies of both idealism and materialism. Like Hegelian freedom, ideological critique has had to adapt and redefine its definition through history, theorizing the incursions of power as they sink increasingly deeper into all aspects of human consciousness.

Marx and Engels were not the first to theorize consciousness as socially determined. Pre-Marxist theorizations, however, relied on psychologicist theories of ideology, explaining false consciousness in terms of tempers and passions afflicting reason. The term ideology originated with the eighteenth-century French philosopher Destutt de Tracy, who proposed a new science of ideas to replace the metaphysical theories that explained ideas as emanations of ideals. No ideas originate from anywhere but humanity, he claimed, and so instead of using religion to explain their origins, we ought to apply the scientific method. De Tracy's term was turned against him when Napoleon claimed to have invented the phrase "ideologue" to refute intellectual proponents of revolution such as Destutt de Tracy, thus "a word originally synonymous
with scientific rationalism ends up denoting an idle and speculative idealism" (Eagleton 232).

In *Ideology*, Terry Eagleton outlines the two definitions of ideology found in the writings of Marx. The earlier definition, in Marx and Engels' 1846 work *The German Ideology*, defines ideology as, in Eagleton's shorthand, "social illusions anchored in real contradictions" (72). Theorizing ideology as a superstructural element, Marx and Engels emphasized that only changes to the material base would change the ideas and beliefs of society. This materialism was asserted as a corrective to the Hegelian model of history, in which man's consciousness was theorized as a reflection of the world. Marx and Engels turn Hegel on his head, in their famous inversion of his model, but, as Eagleton notes, "to invert a polarity is not necessarily to transform it," and this inversion reasserts a distinction between reality and ideas that raises as many problems as it resolves (76).

The later definition of ideology provided by Marx is found in *Capital* (1867). This definition is derived from Marx's theory of commodity fetishism, in which "in capitalist society, the actual social relations between human beings are governed by the apparently autonomous interactions of the commodities they produce" (84). The illusion is not, as earlier, subjectual. It is, rather, systemic— a "structural effect of capitalism" whose basis is the commodity form. The commodity form is defined in the first part of *Capital*, where Marx describes how the advent of trade in early societies led to a commodification of objects that imbues them with a "dual nature," a combination of use-value (the specific usefulness of an object, based on the amount of labor that went into making it) and exchange-value (that which the object can be exchanged for) (138). Marx links the ability
of capitalists to extract labor power from their workers by converting it to surplus value to the universalizing exchange value of the commodity form. Unlike the earlier definition, which theorized ideas as false to a situation which, if seen in truth, would lead one to a revolutionary, Marxist perspective, this later definition theorizes ideas as true to a situation which, when seen in truth, is itself fundamentally distorted.

The view of ideology formulated by Hungarian Marxist critic Georg Lukács is based on Marx's discussion of commodification, theorizing that the worker under capitalism replaces "natural" human relations with objectivized exchanges between commodities. This replacement of sensual, organic life with abstracted exchange is defined as reification, a process that imposes a rationalist and homogeneous uniformity over all aspects of society. Lukács' interpretation of the later Marx's critique of political economy recontextualizes it within the earlier Marx's emphasis on alienation. Although reification permeates society, Lukács emphasizes that it is particularly evident in the consciousness of the proletariat. He points out that the worker, with nothing left to sell but his or her labor, "is typical of society as a whole in that this self-objectification, this transformation of a human function into a commodity, reveals in all its starkness the dehumanized and dehumanizing function of the commodity relation" (HCC 92).

The concept of ideology was expanded into the idea of hegemony in the Prison Notebooks of the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci. Ideological critiques of society assumed an expressive causality, locating the source of false consciousness either in the subjectivity of the worker or in the commodity form. Gramsci realized that ideas have no essential meaning or pre-given tendency to function oppressively. Rather, ideas are free-
floating signifiers whose meaning is entirely context-dependent. Hegemony describes the unified appearance that domination instills in a society. In order to critique this unity, the constellation of ideas that constitute hegemony must be disassembled and shown for what they are, a totalizing illusion installed by the will of the ruling class.

For Louis Althusser, ideology is defined as the subjectual internalization of a sense of "inner self." In "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," he outlines the real networks—institutions, schools, rituals—through which this interiority is installed. Following the ecclesiastical advice of Pascal, Althusser emphasizes that you have to go down on your knees before you believe. This poststructural reformulation of ideology abandons the possibility of a dialectical overcoming of false consciousness, and is an instance of scientific Marxism insofar as it emphasizes the deterministic aspects of social control. Earlier theories saw particular ideas as ideological; Althusser sees the practices that support and regulate the work force as the materialization of ideas. Althusser correctly points out that the content of a belief system is not as important as the way it is lived. You may be a proponent of revolution and anarchy, but if the only way you express this is by watching television, the government has nothing to worry about.

In their portrayals of class relations, Thirties authors often critiqued American culture in a way that resembles the ideological critique of their contemporary Lukács. Like Lukács, they looked to the workers for direction. The New Masses actively solicited manuscripts from the working class, and in much of the writing and thinking of the Thirties there is a general veneration of the working class. Middle-class writers often expressed leftist themes by imagining working class characters and expressed anxiety
about the privilege and complicity that their class status suggested. Writers in the Thirties were unacquainted with the writings of Lukács, but the American intellectual Left in the Thirties took an analogous view to Lukács' insofar as they appealed to actual workers to take part in the culture of revolution.

Ideological fiction approaches human behavior from a distance. It accepts and applies the unidirectional causality of the base-superstructure model, regarding form-obsessed literature as a cultural by-product of this century's atomized, reified social structure. Unlike the irony, allusion, and paradox that characterized much of high literary modernism, ideological fiction is more inclined to be sincere, hortatory, and realist. It is uninterested in plumbing the depths of the unconscious or in seeking the relationship of consciousness to language. Ideological fiction interprets ideas and language as codes perpetuating domination in cultural contexts that can be rationally understood and manipulated. This mode of fiction maintains a strict demarcation between ideas and reality.

In this view of culture, all subjectivity is false, a deceptive ruse perpetuating economic domination. But literature does not simply offer a theory of false consciousness; the thought is not itself false, but is rather a true--i.e. accurate--reflection of a false--i.e. inherently oppressive--situation. Characters develop in ideological fiction according to the above-mentioned, historical materialist causality. They do not evolve organically, or according to a sense of human nature, nor do they act as autonomous intentional agents. Character is decentered. The experimentation is sociological rather than semiotic.
The claim that ideology is more determinative of character than individual free will or consciousness is arguably a true one, and certainly a thesis worth exploring. And yet to construct fictional works in which such causality is dramatized is to defy humanistic literary aesthetic conventions. Lionel Trilling critiqued the tendency "to ideologize all things into grayness" in his 1951 critical work *The Liberal Imagination*, in which he defined ideology as "the habit or the ritual of showing respect for certain formulas to which, for various reasons having to do with emotional safety, we have very strong ties of whose meaning and consequences in activity we have no clear understanding" (302, 286). Trilling's description characterizes formulaic ideology as an idealistic discourse that is unable to understand the connection between thought and action. In this interpretation, ideological culture is the opposite of polyphony, that novelistic trait admired by Bakhtin for its liberal pluralism. Bakhtin considers literature that allows its own infiltration by the discourses and ideas of others to be the true accomplishment of the novelistic imagination. In a sense, ideological fiction thematically defies Bakhtin's liberal criteria.

Ideological fiction and identitarian fiction are modes of narrative logic that sometimes work in opposition to one another. These two modes function as antithetical poles in Robert Cantwell's 1934 strike novel *The Land of Plenty*. Acknowledged by critics since Rideout as one of the decade's best, *The Land of Plenty* describes the events leading up to a strike at a wood mill in a coastal town in the Pacific Northwest. Barbara Foley, in *Radical Representations*, groups it with Thirties novels that "emphasize the mass nature of workers' movements and the necessarily collective nature of leadership."
But they end up featuring protagonists whose broad individual shoulders are metonymic of proletarian strength" (Foley 238). The plot revolves around a labor crisis at a Pacific Northwest wood-processing mill, after an electric power failure. The first half of the book describes a power failure at the mill. Entitled "Power and Light," the events recounted in this section ironizes the section title as well as the book's title. Not only is there no land of plenty in the novel, which depicts the scarcity and violent coercion inflicted by capitalism, there is scant power nor light. The second half of the book also negates its title, "The Education of a Worker." In this section, the events that follow the power outage lead to a climactic strike confrontation that disillusions Johnny Hagen, a worker at the mill who sees beyond ideology to understand the real conditions for himself, his town, and for workers all over the country. In all three titles, language negates meaning, emphasizing the distance between representation and reality.

*The Land of Plenty* explores consciousness as both an ideological fiction and a source of identity. The scenes set in or around the wood mill explore ideology as a means of explaining human behavior, whereas the scenes set within the community itself, outside of the workplace, figure identity as the key determinant. The shifts in causality that occur are oftentimes dramatic: some characters appear as fixed, static automatons, reacting as systemic functions without apparent willpower. This is the case with MacMahon, the factory owner, who weeps openly over a family dinner with the guilt he feels regarding the crisis at his factory, yet proceeds unflinchingly to dispatch orders to open fire on the strikers. In such a description, the character's self-conceived identity is nothing more than a means of reconciling himself to his inhuman function, and this theme
is echoed in the anonymity of his name. He has no first name, and is only referred to by his last, even in the scenes of his home life.

The first section of the novel, set in the factory, describes human behavior as largely the product of ideology. Workers are described as mechanistic extensions of machines. Carl Belcher, the villainous "efficiency expert" who has been hired to trim the workforce, exemplifies this alienating facelessness. Workers say of him: "if it wasn't Carl it would be someone else like him"(122). Animalistic and simple-minded, Carl is strictly a company man without autonomy or self-control: "the words were bubbling up of their own accord; he did not know what he was saying"(61). Carl is an entirely ideological character, with his false consciousness revealed through passages of free indirect discourse. In several chapters that are told from his perspective, the self-justifying flow of thought recounted self-deconstructs, exposing untenable contradictions. In the following description, for instance, Carl justifies his hatred for the aged worker Hagen:

From the very first, long before he had taken over the night shift and had only tried to find out how Hagen spent his time when he was not oiling the motors, when he had gone to Hagen in a perfectly friendly way and asked him so he would have it down on his records--from that time they had never got along and Hagen had never told him. When he complained to MacMahon, MacMahon had told him to go easy, Hagen was an old hand, longer in the factory than anyone else; and it had taken Carl a long time to see that MacMahon was afraid of Hagen, afraid of the bad feeling that would grow up if he was fired. Carl could not get over it. Whenever it came up he thought he saw a kind of insolence and serenity in Hagen, as though he knew that he was safe. Whenever Carl's back was turned he knew that Hagen loafed, and bragged about his loafing, and through all the ways he got his information he knew that Hagen ridiculed him and lied about what he was doing. (11)
The strain on this passage comes from the fact that, despite the attempt to see things from Carl's perspective, this perspective defies its own self-understanding: Carl thinks that he despises Hagen for his laziness, when in fact the recounted train of thought shows that the real source of Carl's hate is his jealousy of the respect that Hagen receives from the mill owner, MacMahon. This passage exemplifies the Bakhtinian dialogic. Lukács writes how "dialectical thought dissolves the rigid appearance of things, which obtains also in thinking, into the processes that they really are" (Essays on Realism 26). It furthermore exemplifies ideological fiction: the inner monologue of the character seems false, and is exposed as such by contrast with the reality of the working conditions. Like the Lukácsian definition of ideology, the narrated thought of Carl is not so much false as it is true to a flawed situation.

The section entitled "Power and light" alludes to the conflict that takes place between the workers and the management during the night of the outage. Old Hagen, the bear-like, seasoned worker, embodies labor power in its raw form:

His overalls were too large for him. The waist line came at his hips. His round face was flushed and tired and his blond hair rose straight up over his forehead; sweat and sawdust streaked his cheeks and there were heavy circles under his eyes. (Cantwell 38)

The workers are described both as herd-like and as mechanistic extensions of the goods-producing machines. As the mill grinds to a halt around them, they respond with an ingrained automatism that is at once impressive for its efficiency and depressing for its deep, instinctual penetration into their minds. Their calmness in the wake of the blackout is contrasted by the flailing management skills of Carl and his assistant Morley. Carl's
lame attempts at leadership turn into panicked attempts to retain order as the crisis continues: "He was lost at the dead-end of a blank passage, lost in a dangerous tangle of creeping vines and poisonous wires, surrounded by lurking saber-toothed machinery"(99).

The lonesome mill, pitched into darkness, becomes, for the management, the capricious and grotesque obverse of the normally well-lit mill:

> When no current was passing through the wires the sound of the switch releasing was hollow, a dull throb, somewhat like the sound of a rock dropped into a well. For a time this was the only sound in the factory, this dull throb of switches cutting a current that had already ceased to flow. (Cantwell 3)

As machine and nature metaphorize one another, codes of representation reveal their own limits.

While the workers restore order and take the power-failure as an opportunity to rest and smoke, the management becomes lost beneath the mill. Carl and his superior, MacMahon, find themselves on the tidal flat that extends beneath the mill into the Pacific Ocean. Out on the wasted plane, the two become increasingly lost. Their attempts to restore light and to maintain order with flashlights and car headlights, finally give way to resignation. Carl reimagines an earlier confrontation with Hagen. The scene has already been recounted, in Chapter Two, titled "Hagen":

> There was a moment's silence. Then Hagen said, "Well, Carl, if you don't like the way I work, you know what there is to do about it."

> The crowd had grown around the light. Carl glanced up before he spoke. "I didn't say I didn't like the way you worked!" he said. He tried to say it angrily but his voice faltered.

> "If you don't like the way I work," Hagen repeated, "go pull my card."(67-8)
Later, beneath the factory, the scene is remembered differently:

He remembered Hagen screaming at him, *pull my card, if you want to*, hysterical, his fat face getting tense, his eyes wild. *If you don't like the way I work, go pull my card.* He remembered Hagen screaming at him, hysterical as a woman, in front of the whole crew. It had made Carl nervous; when he had any trouble he liked to talk things over quietly; it was no use getting excited, yelling, making a lot of trouble. (150)

For Carl, the ground beneath the factory is a "nightmare unreality"(154). Without power and light, his pathologies and phantoms multiply and rise in a setting whose grotesque description signals the shift away from the regimented order of the workplace, into a more liminal space in which power relations appear suspended. In a moment of brief peace, manager and owner lie, exhausted, in the underbrush. Fourth of July fireworks explode overhead. MacMahon had been on his way to socialize with the officers of the battleship that is launching the fireworks. MacMahon holds forth on the beauty of the nationalistic spectacle. He tells Carl he admires the military's "system"(155). Carl's attempts to express himself are swept aside by MacMahon, who identifies himself with the nation, the presidency, and the white race.

The fireworks symbolize and critique populist nationalism. Cantwell draws parallels between fireworks and the explosions of military artillery. The fireworks, through their association with the order of the military and the nationalism of the Fourth of July, symbolize "The People," in the sense of a national subject. Their bursts synchronize the diverse character perspectives, lighting up the landscape, and revealing to Carl that they are in fact turned around and completely off-course. Those fireworks,
however, appear differently to the workers, "whose first thought when they watched an exhibition of fireworks was of the rushed and feverish toil of the men who prepared the rockets and set them off"(249). Although the fireworks hail them with their symbolism of nationality, the workers's first concerns are the relations of production.

The second section of the book, "The Education of a Worker," examines the nature of the "light" of national subjectivity. The novel's focus moves from the wood mill to the homes and private lives of the characters. In the earlier section, subjectivity could be portrayed as a reflection of the mode of production. There is no light without power. In the second half, we see workers in their private lives. This section's title, like the first, is an ironic one. The education that Johnny receives brings the reality of the social totality into view for him, exposing the objective conditions by which the working class is subjugated.

The pervasive light imagery in the novel provides a symbolic exploration of the social bonds that bring the characters together. This light imagery follows Johnny's education. When he first appears in the narrative he is in darkness and, as the novel continues, light increases around Johnny. Walt's speeding car's lights, as they fade into the distance, leaving Johnny abandoned, symbolize the ambition that drives Walt and when Johnny awakens the next morning, at home in his bed, the light of epiphany shines harshly through the window, exposing the paucity of his home life:

The shade on the window was drawn except for a few inches at the bottom; the window was up and the light came in hot and unsparing, lighting up the torn and spotted wall paper, the door frame that did not fit tightly into the wall, the little cloudy balls of dust under the other bed. (233)
Awakening in the crowded, brightly-lit house, Johnny is bombarded with family chatter, with his brother-in-law Gerald prattling about the wealthiest neighborhoods in the country. Johnny then spots a light bill, and fixates upon a pamphlet that accompanies the bill. The pamphlet, essentially propaganda from the electric company, spells out a "history of light," from primitive man through whale-oil, to "modern lighting"(239):

Inside the pamphlet was another folder that opened out like a map, and inside it were printed cards reading
Don't strain your eyes! Use more light! He read them carefully. Are your children cross and fretful? Do you suffer from headaches? One picture showed a group of puny, undersized children trying to read in a dark room, their foreheads wrinkled with eyestrain and looks of anguish on their features. Mumsie, my head hurts so! In the next picture the room was well-lighted and the children were smiling happily. They had put on weight, too, and their clothes were better. Use more light, he read. It pays in the long run.

That's true, he thought. People shouldn't try to read if they haven't got enough light. (239)

The critique being made against ideology through the use of light symbolism here is two-fold. First of all, the rhetoric of light, its epochal heritage of progress and improvement, as well as the familial scene that is evoked to show the debilitating cost of badly-lit children, are both kitsch. By folding the discourse of progress and enlightenment into itself, the novel is able to foreground the vacuity of the propagandistic light bill. The second aspect of the critique is Johnny's reaction. His deadpan response is an absurd misunderstanding of the intention of the bill's propaganda; he reads it, to paraphrase Walter Benjamin, "against the grain." Instead of the intended meaning--consume more electricity in order to improve yourself--Johnny's understanding is negative: Without light, there can be no understanding, no reading. Insofar as the novel critiques the
ideology of nationalism through the use of light imagery, this passage reiterates the theme that the novel repeatedly makes: that outside of the social web of the community, which forms "the people" whose paradigmatic types fill the novel, there is only darkness. By the standards of light that exemplify the nation's self-image, the darkness is a void. The light bill's ideology is misguided. No one pays enough attention to this sort of communication to make the content of the ideology --Use more light!--an issue at all.

Light returns as a symbol in Chapter Five of Part Two, "THE LIGHT MAN." This chapter begins with the arrival of relatives at the Hagen home, which takes the novel into its most concentrated identitarian passage. The relatives, Bill and Ruth and their children, are refugees of the Depression, migrating from Texas where "The poor people are starving"(285). Their folksy familial interaction is reminiscent of Steinbeck's Joad family from The Grapes of Wrath. From their homogeneous names to their sunburned expressions that blend "defiance and shame," the relatives are standardized Depression victims(284). Bill tells Hagen:

Christ, there are thousands of people on the roads, thousands, men looking for work--sometimes whole families--all up and down the country--thousands! You see the poor devils hiking along the highways, even down in the desert, even up in them God-awful mountains in California, miles from nowhere, way out in the woods--everywhere you go. (286)

In this passage, as in The Grapes of Wrath, the appeal is made in terms of identity. The Depression is wrecking the lives of familiar figures, members of families. This version of the people, populated by Bills and Ruths, stands in for what was actually a far more diverse, immigrant-cultured working class. Both Steinbeck and Cantwell make the
argument, through identitarian fiction, that the people who suffer the most in the Depression are, most importantly, recognizably human. In order to do that, the characters are typified, and regionalism and diverse cultures are erased, as if the country were one big white family.

The light man's visit interrupts the relatives' arrival, and Hagen meets privately with him. At first the light man behaves officiously, reciting statistics about the "structure, poles, wires, conduits, and submarine cables" that must be maintained.(289). Although he attempts to create a figure of authority, the light man does not intimidate Hagen. "By God, I don't see what's the matter with you people. I paid my light bill every month for twenty years to your people. It don't amount to four dollars," says Hagen, with indignance(289). The light man, touched by Hagen's heartfelt appeals, is able to "put him down for something on the fifteenth," despite Hagen's assertion that he cannot pay, now or then. In this representation, the light company man acts surprisingly humanely to Hagen. This representation of the pressures of the infrastructure and the powerful interests that regulate society reveals the limits of identitarian fiction. In the figure of the bespectacled, lecturing light man we find the embodiment of the unforgiving forces of economic poverty. But this novelistic representation puts a human face on a structural dynamic that is in fact inhumane and insensitive to human suffering. In the context of the chapter, it functions contiguous to the family description: the family musters hope despite economic destitution, only to confront more impending debt. This representation also shows the shortcomings of identitarian fiction, as the narrative direction of the story ends up creating a representation of the social structure that is inaccurately soft and kind, a
characterization that stands in contrast to the more direct critiques made in the earlier passages of identitarian fiction that took place in the blackened factory, "a huge and shapeless heap of darkness more intense than the darkness surrounding it"(113).

The separate worlds of the community and the mode of production, with their respective realms of identitarian and ideological fiction, increasingly blur as the novel heads into the rising action of the strike, culminating in the occupation of the factory by the strikers that is broken by the police, who attack the strikers, beating Ellen and killing Hagen. The pacing of the novel increases dramatically as it recounts the action outside the factory in the second section, rushing forward through days of strike to return to the factory, now staffed by a scab crew, with increased police presence and a thunderous downpour that brings tensions to a fore. It is through Johnny's interactions with other townspeople that he attains his education. Walt's betrayal haunts him for the rest of the novel, as he fantasizes about torturing and killing Walt.

Walt Connor's character is the central pole in the novel's identity-based plot developments. The brutality and danger of his Friday night horseplay, terrorizing Johnny, Marie, and Ellen during the first night, lodges him in Johnny's imagination, who fantasizes violent revenge on Walt for the rest of the novel, and he likewise permeates the imaginations of the two sisters. Walt introduces racism into the narrative, calling Winters a half-breed during a confrontation during the blackout. He later refuses to attend a meeting organizing the strike in order to go on a date(281). His Machiavellian figure dominates the sections of the novel set in the community. He steals Marie MacMahon, the daughter of the factory owner, from her bland college boyfriend, and finds himself
ascending the ranks of the evil capitalists, who sit and smoke in the den, complete with stuffed cats on the walls, after a meal of red meat, and plan to release the goon squads to clean out the strikers "like you'd clean out a nest of cockroaches"(345). As Walt comes to understand that the owners plan to frame Winters, a worker with whom he has become friends, he finally renounces the owners, disgusted by their tactics. Walt disappears as the narrative veers back, finally, into the factory grounds. But his centrality to the identitarian fiction passages in the novel attests to the force of the rebel figure, whose machinations, like Milton's Satan, are more intriguing than those of the strikers.

In addition to the identity-based developments that take place in the community, there is an enveloping perspective on the collective identity of the community, through representations of the media and the rituals of the Fourth of July. These sections return the narrative to a focus on culture as ideology. In a passage that adumbrates DeLillo's television set (a virtual character in his novel *White Noise*), the radio drones on while Walt takes a warm bath:

"To whom do we owe this fealty?" the radio asked. "Today we are rich in material things. Rich beyond the dreams of the wildest prophets of that day and era! But let us beware lest, in our pursuit of material wealth we do not neglect that fine fidelity to freedom, that steadfast devotion to liberty, that unshakable allegiance to spiritual values to which the founders of our country pledged their lives when they signed the Declaration of Independence a hundred and fifty-three years ago today. (274)

The novel's Fourth of July setting allows for some bizarre descriptions of parading Shriners and other celebratory rituals. Large statue of liberty replicas strapped to trucks drive down the street. In these representations, the mass media is critiqued as ideological,
covering the real struggles of workers with nationalistic bombast. The degree to which the media is under the control of the factory interests is revealed when Johnny reads a biased report of the strike's genesis. The newspaper story, in which everything is true and yet is "just a little bit wrong," calls the workers a "mob," and accuses them of attacking the office workers in the factory, when in fact they were beckoning to them, through the windows, to join them (299). The headline accuses: "STRIKERS STORM OFFICE: Threaten Girls" (299).

At the novel's conclusion, the focus returns to ideology. In this final section, Johnny witnesses the beating of Ellen and then, in the last pages of the novel, discovers that his father has been killed by the police during the strike. These developments are juxtaposed to MacMahon's dinner with his superior, Mr. Digby. What upsets MacMahon is the fact that the workers, by occupying the factory, have taken possession of his property: "'You don't know how I feel,' he gasped. 'If they were in my own house I wouldn't feel any different'" (334). For MacMahon, there is no separation of ideology and identity. Despite its opulence, the dinner is weak in spirit, although all members try to appear cheerful. To Marie, the daughter, her father appears a defeated, weak man. She compares him to Digby:

Rose noted the resemblance to her father. Both men were of approximately the same build and their features were roughly similar, but in comparison with Mr. Digby's polished ease, her father's fluctuating grimaces of intensity and relaxation--of nervousness--made him seem a cruel caricature of his distinguished employer. The difference was reflected in their contrasting methods of putting food in their mouths. MacMahon would cut a bit of meat with one motion, and put it in his mouth with a swift, jerky movement of his fork; while for Mr. Digby there was no
sharp break in the process, as his movements, like his
words, were smooth and unvaried, and the lifting of the
fork to his mouth was but a part of a calm, methodical
process which began as soon as he sat down at the table.
(334)

Marie's inner monologue reads her father's manners as symptoms of his inferiority. In
fact, the differences reflect the respective positions of the two businessmen. The growing
daughterly affection that Marie feels for Digby through the course of the meal shows the
strength of class signifiers, which here win Marie over, against the pull of familial loyalty.

The novel's end is strongly ideological. The last scenes of the novel are dark, with
the long-drained police headlights fading and the crowd amassing underneath the
tempestuous, blackened sky. Walt disappears from the narrative, leaving his story
unresolved. Likewise, Ellen's romantic plot is left unfinished. Even the fate of Johnny's
father is uncertain. Three workers--Johnny, Vin Garl, and a third--take refuge through the
tide flat to escape the police, and the novel ends with them "waiting for the darkness to
come like a friend and set them free"(369). This irresolute ending, typical of Thirties
leftist novels, has little closure and ends abruptly, as though the police action against the
 strikers cuts short all of the identititarian stories that were in progress. The last turn into
darkness reflects the larger resistance to the forces of "light" that seek to control and
harness the worker's labor power. Unfortunately, in the novel's light/dark imagery there is
nothing there besides temporary refuge. Worker's consciousness cannot be imagined in
light, but only as a darkness beyond illumination.

The Land of Plenty's use of the negative as well as its emphasis on light/dark
imagery construct a narrative that is at once a product of national hegemony and, also, an
attempt to critique that ideology. The conflicting causalities in the novel find no
resolution at the novel's end. Rather, ideological concerns preclude the identity-based
plots. In the last scene, Johnny Hagen is in the woods with two strangers, unsure if his
father is alive or not. In this last moment, his identity—insofar as it is constituted by his
sweetheart Ellen, his foil Walt, and his father's authority—vanishes, leaving three men
bound by class, running from a cold, hostile world.

Other novels from the Thirties deal with the conflict between identity and
ideology in different ways, as forthcoming chapters will show, but there is a consistent
irreconcilability between the two terms. Novels like The Land of Plenty set the stage for a
definition of the people that will continue throughout the century. Walt Connor is a
harbinger of a constant cultural space, the very same figure that will continue through the
forties and fifties, and further into the world of marketing and advertising. This space is
akin to a type, except that the types that signify this space change, with increasing
rapidity, throughout the twentieth century. Before Johnny is betrayed by Walt, his
worshipful awe is tangible:

He sat back and listened to Walt, dreaming of the ivy-
covered halls, the long slopes of green lawn, the beautiful
coods, each with her own sports roadster, giving herself so
gaily and passionately with a true F. Scott Fitzgerald
abandon; yes, and long canoe rides on the lake, with the
water lapping the frail sides of the fragile craft, and long
bull-fests, blue with tobacco smoke, before the open fire of
the country-club fraternity house, and fellows smoking
pipes sitting up all night chewing the fat about philosophy
and sex! (109)

The appeal of Walt for Johnny is the existence that he imagines Walt leading, in which he
has total freedom, with many women to seduce and many men to befriend. Like Walt,
Johnny wants to defy authority, to rebel, to escape, to yell "Yow! Baby!, . . . Hi yah! Hi yah! . . . Wowie!" (100, 209). The reference to Fitzgerald evokes his most famous creation, Jay Gatsby, the paradigmatic self-invented success. This is the space of the present, of the individual resisting systemization. It is the perpetual American myth of freedom, represented by an Emersonian self that embraces all of "mankind."

The implicit figure at the heart of the American myth of radical self-definition is the myth of the moral loner who justly defies illegitimate laws. The earlier moral embodiments of this figure, such as the mass cultural icons Superman and the Lone Ranger, eventually yield to a commodified set of images promoting a freedom-loving, sporting lifestyle. Johnny Hagen, white, straight, and abused by class oppression, is an amalgamation of conservative signifiers and ideological themes. His simplistic characterization is aimed not at a high literary audience, but rather is designed to register as a figure of Hollywood mass culture. By the end of the Popular Front period of World War Two, this space is embodied by the film roles of James Stewart, most emblematically in *Mr. Smith Goes To Washington*. In the fifties comes the Hollywood rebel against the establishment. This rebel figure has been taken up abroad, apparent in the characterization of the United States as a blustering cowboy on the international stage. Not only has the definition of the rebel identity been repeatedly defined; to the degree that rebellion has been centripetally co-opted, it has been centrifugally rejected in content while maintained in form.

Johnny's break with Walt brings him closer to Ellen. Johnny's attraction to Ellen defines a particular strain of working-class sexiness:
The band tied around her hair made her forehead look high and smooth, and her features were small and delicate; . . . and her lips were partly opened as she tried to see who was in the car. Her dark blue overalls were fitted tightly around her waist and the upper part of her legs, flaring out at the cuffs to conceal her shoes. She wore a red sash around her waist, and a white shirt open at the throat. The shift fitted her loosely; a slight breeze ruffled the cloth over her breasts. (213)

Johnny's attraction for Ellen draws him into the community of the strikers. Johnny resists the "dainty breasts" and "secret Davenports" of Walt's "sport" lifestyle for Ellen, but in the context of the book's ideological concerns, their relationship goes undeveloped, leaving her most significant as a means of exchange bonding Johnny to the (largely homosocial) society of workers(109). He resists the pull of the rebel figure, and the relationship that he chooses instead seems a thin patina of identitarian logic to concretize his new ideological perspective.

_The Land of Plenty_ is considered an especially well-written instance of Thirties leftist fiction, partly due to its use of multiple perspectives in a way that has suggested the potentialities of communal models of narrative to provide an alternative to the individualistic plottings of the conventional realist novel. This praise is misdirected, because the homogeneity of style that permeates the diverse character narratives exemplifies not an instantiation of radical democracy but rather a dramatization of the homogeneity instilled by a reliance on familiar conventions and stereotypes. The disruptions that interrupt this realm--the roar of industrial machinery, the bursts of nationalistic fireworks rituals, and the Panglossian light bill that extolls the use of electricity as though it were knowledge--all point out the limits of identitarian fiction.
Other novels would have to further plumb the "darkness within the darkness" of working-class consciousness. Nonetheless, the book remains an interesting fusion of documentary realism and gothic sensational fiction, maintaining a pathologically tight focus on the identitarian complexes and phobias of its main characters even as the forces of industrial oppression render those concerns moot issues.
Chapter Three
"I was not a character in a novel": Fictionalizing the Self in Agnes Smedley's *Daughter of Earth*

I do not write mere words. I write of human flesh and blood. There is a hatred and a bitterness with roots in experience and conviction. Words cannot erase that experience.

Agnes Smedley

This chapter examines the treatment of gender and sexuality in the literary leftism of the Thirties. Compared to the advances that were made in theorizing gender during the several decades leading up to the Depression by female modernist writers, the culture produced by leftists during the Thirties seems in many respects retrograde and conservative. The homophobia of male writers and critics, their acceptance and use of a hegemonic discourse of family, and the limited range of female characters that they were able to imagine cannot be overlooked in the reconsideration of Thirties literary leftism. Throughout the Thirties, leftist writers and critics, in their rush to examine identity first in terms of class, and then race, underestimated the pervasive influence of gendered roles and sexual norms. By not paying explicit attention to these forces of oppression, cultural producers were limited by semiotic structures that perpetuated a hetero-normative discourse of sexuality. These structures exerted an influence upon the culture that predetermined and limited the revolutionary strategies developed by Thirties literary leftists. Marie Smedley's autobiographical novel *Daughter of Earth* reveals how even the most literarily well-crafted works from the period were unable to articulate a revolutionary feminist subjectivity.

The market crash of 1929 and the Depression that followed allowed leftist thought to penetrate and influence American culture to an unprecedented degree. Throughout the
Thirties, literary leftists mounted a critique against industrial capitalism that won many converts, first through the organized efforts of Communist organizations such as the John Reed Clubs, then later, through the more widespread influence of fellow travelers, a large group of officially-unaffiliated yet sympathetic liberals and moderates. Through both phases of the decade, leftist writers and critics were able to persuade many Americans to reconsider their national and cultural identity. In literature, journalism, and art, key aspects of American hegemony were denaturalized. The first half of the decade, with its emphasis on the working masses, was able to critique the false divisions of class, leading large numbers of Americans to no longer trust in the mechanisms of the meritocratic hierarchies that justified economic inequality in terms of individuals' abilities. The later period, with its populist appeal to "the people," was able to perform a similar deconstruction of both biologically and culturally-defined racism, arguing that all races were subsumed under the metaphor of a global family.

In contrast to the progress that was made challenging essentialist conceptions of class and race, the Depression left was unable to mount a similar critique against gender and sexuality. Indeed, writers and critics often articulated their arguments against the false divisions of race and class by relying upon a normative discourse of heterosexual domesticity. The homophobia and sexism of the decade is undeniable in the infamous bigoted remarks of certain leftist authors, such as John Dos Passos, who, in a 1932 letter to Hemingway, complained about the company of cocktail parties, writing of "too many drawing-room bitches . . . its like fairies getting into a bar--ruin it in no time"(qtd. Denning 185). Mike Gold, editor or the New Masses, famously attacked Thornton Wilder in a 1929 letter as "that fairy-like Anglo-American curate . . . He is a beautiful, rouged,
combed, well-dressed corpse, lying among the sacred candles and lilies of the past" (qtd. Aaron 238). Also, he once described Walter Pater as a writer "like a fairy for a fairy" (qtd. Lauret 27).

An unfortunate cultural product of the fusion of socialist ideology and American identity was a sentimental maternalism that pervaded the culture of the Depression left. Representations of women were largely limited to the roles they played as mothers and keepers of the hearth. This sexism should be seen as a continuation of a long-standing pattern within the Communist Party of the United States of America (CPUSA). In her essay on the role of women in the CPUSA during the twenties and Thirties, Rosalyn Baxandall describes how "The Soviets were more conscious of women's importance during this period than was the CPUSA" (145).

It was during the twenties that the CPUSA came to see the mother as the defining symbol of women's specific strength. During that period, female party members were often addressed with the appellation of Mother (145). James Farrell's 1952 novel-memoir *Yet Other Waters* satirizes the degree to which the figure of the mother became affiliated with the culture of the left. An editor character based on Mike Gold prescribes:

"If," Mark Singer was saying, 'if you have a heroine in a boudoir, that is art. If you write about a proletarian mother, that is propaganda."

Applause. (107)

In *The Cultural Front*, Michael Denning addresses the long-standing accusations of sexism made against Thirties literary leftism. These critiques continue today, most recently in the critical work of Paula Rabinowitz, who, in *Labor and Desire*, argues that Thirties literary leftists understood sex and gender as "metaphors rather than . . . historically determined and determining structures of oppression" (7). Denning
distinguishes two types of accusations made against Depression-era leftists: one is made at the level of the cultural politics, and the other at the level of aesthetic ideology. The former, which refers to the actual organizational structures of the left during that time, cannot hold. There were, Denning points out, many women involved in the CPUSA rank and file who were prominent teachers and activists. The latter accusation, however, that the aesthetics of the culture produced reflected the dominant ideology's sexism and homophobia, is not so easily refuted. In many ways, Thirties leftism is culpable of the same shortsightedness as classic Marxism, summarized by Rosalyn Baxandall:

The basic tenets of classic Marxism assumed that (1) the sexual struggle predated capitalism and therefore didn't exist in capitalism or socialist society except as an anachronism; (2) the natural division of labor based on the ability of women to bear children is universal; (3) sexuality is relevant only from the point of view of procreation, not pleasure; and (4) the emancipation of women will occur when they join the proletarian struggle in the workplace. (143)

To this day, the sexism and homophobia of the Thirties linger over the decade like unrehabilitatable thunderclouds. They can be partially explained as symptoms of the larger cultural conservatism of 1930s America. The left was certainly no more sexist or homophobic than the rest of the country. The left cannot be held responsible for creating the conservative attitudes of the time, but neither can it be commended for successfully resisting these deepest aspects of American hegemony.

The best-known authors of the day reproduced the sexual economy of the bourgeois family structure. Whereas the Wobblies fixed on the rebel girl as their icon of feminine revolution, the Thirties left fixed upon the figure of the mother. Mary LeDuc Gibbons' poem "Mothers" uses motherhood as a means to cut across barriers of race. Considering her own concerns as a mother in comparison to those of a rural mother of
color, she writes: "After all, at night we are the same outline against the moon, aren't we?/Except your kerchief silhouettes prettier than my hair, dark mother" (Nekola 173).

Not all radical women writers from the Thirties used motherhood uncritically. Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, a leader and organizer in the communist party, wrote a pamphlet entitled "I Didn't Raise My Son for Wall Street" (Baxandall 154). Lucia Trent, a leftist poet and essayist during the Thirties, leveled an attack against motherhood in her poem "Breed, Women, Breed." Characterizing motherhood as an ideological state apparatus recreating capitalism's labor power, she wrote:

Breed, little mothers,
With the sunken eyes and the sagging cheeks,
Breed for the bankers, the crafty and terrible masters of men,
Breed a race of machines,
A race of anemic, round-shouldered, subway-herded machines.
(Nekola 168)

This attack on motherhood indicts it as a complacent support of capitalism. It contradicts the humanist discourse of family by describing children who are weak, malleable, cookie-cutter subjects ripe for exploitation. While other writers venerated motherhood as a symbol of virtue and love, Trent implies that such symbolism is a ruse, perpetuating the repopulation of the work force. In Trent's description, the ideology of motherhood becomes yet another mechanized aspect of dehumanizing modernity.

The journalism and fiction of Meridel le Sueur examines the role of the working-class mother. Reacting against the "Ma Joadism" of some leftist writers, who "routinely extolled the home-front Ma Joad for knowing her place, shuddered at a companionate model of family earnings, scanted the single working mother, and looked askance at the self-supporting solo woman," le Sueur's work addresses issues of child-raising and family (Hapke 89, 72). Her novel The Girl examines the transformation of the title
character, simply named "the girl," as she undergoes transformations brought on by pregnancy, culminating with the birth of her child.

Agnes Smedley's autobiographical novel *Daughter of Earth* stands in contrast to the motherly corpus. Instead of praising family as a metaphor for a potential collective class subject, Smedley's life story describes family as an abusive, sense-killing regime whose influence she must constantly and actively resist. Marie, who is a fictionalized version of Smedley, is independent and butch, a pistol-packing, knife-wielding woman of the frontier. Refusing to play the subaltern wife of the traditional family, she comes to possess a "hatred I expressed for women, marriage, and children"(180). Marie takes on a persona that is distinctly masculine. Like her counterparts in European novels from the period such as Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* or Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood*, Marie dresses in an androgynous style and eschews traditional models of feminine weakness and passivity. Unlike these other protagonists, however, Marie chooses men as sexual partners. Marie's choice of men is, increasingly throughout her life, skewed towards the effeminate, soft male.

The roots of Agnes/Marie's formulation of sexual identity can be traced back to earlier scientific and psychological theories, typified by the work of Krafft-Ebing and Havelock Ellis. In many ways, Agnes/Marie typifies the threatening construct of the "Mannish Lesbian," a discursive product of turn-of-the-century physicians, sex reformers, and educators(Smith-Rosenberg 266). This type was recognized in contrast to another, recently defined female subjectivity, the "New Woman," a figure that challenged gender roles using appeals to Enlightenment reason while remaining sexually unrecognized. Scientists studying these women were unable to recognize the sexual core of the lesbian
identity, despite the fact that the close friendships between New Women often involved sexual intimacy, even including mutual genital stimulation and lifelong "friendships."

The sexuality of Marie reveals some profound truths about the construction of identity for Depression-era leftists. Marie's soft men are outsiders, intellectuals haunting the large coastal cities and international revolutionaries. Her last husband, Sardarji, a leader in the movement for free India, has a femininity that is distinctly linked to his national identity:

> Among the Indians I found much that I was seeking—a warmth, an intimate closeness that was not just sex, a gentleness. Sardarji personified this . . . he was a wise and a good man and did not misunderstand my need of love and of a place to rest my spirit. The bond of love, of gratitude, of affection, that held me to him swept beyond him to his people and his movement. This bond has endured the strain of class, of political and of intellectual differences. (Smedley 357)

This description of Marie's husband exemplifies the way that binarisms of hard and soft, masculine and feminine, dominant and submissive transcend other class-based and ideologically-defined differences. Marie's heterosexual partnership facilitates a progressive international connection, but only through a conservative symbolism in which Sardarji metonymizes India through characteristics of softness and sensitivity.

Smedley's narrative is typical of Thirties literary leftism insofar as it uses gender and sexuality as a foundational nexus in which to arrange other aspects of identity. In Smedley's narrative as well as those of others, however, the metaphorical use of gender comes with a cost. The roles of masculine and feminine become essentialized, and insofar as they are used to critique the unnaturalness of other means of domination and hierarchization, their own status as social constructedness is obscured.
What distinguishes Smedley's narrative from other leftist works of the Thirties is her perpetuation of the strong resistance embodied by the "Mannish Lesbian." This difference is linked to her expatriate perspective. Whereas stateside representations of women were often wholly subsumed by the priority of thematizing class-based oppression, Smedley's narrative associates the United States with a masculine, dominant personality. While earlier in the novel, Marie challenged the state as it attempted to dominate her through juridical systems--for instance, when she is questioned in New York City as a suspected spy--her later role as the dominant partner in her relationship with Sardarji aligns her symbolically with the United States' self-conceived international role.

Smedley's novel, originally published in 1929, has been lauded as a paradigmatic text of the Thirties. Paula Rabinowitz, in Labor and Desire, describes Daughter of Earth as "the Ur-text of women's proletariat fiction in the 1930s" that "signaled the beginnings of proletarian realism as a literary movement in the United States"(Rabinowitz 10). This is partially true: there are similarities between Smedley's portrayals of gender and those found in the pro-family, folksy narratives of much leftist culture. But unlike much of Thirties leftist, Smedley's self-determination was founded on the previous century's debates about the value and strength of the New Woman, a figure that is virtually absent from the culture of the Thirties. Smedley's rejection of the ideals of family and motherhood locate her outside the leftist consensus regarding gender and sex.

Smedley's decision to take permanent leave of the U.S., and, finally, to settle in China for the rest of her life, cannot be seen as simply a transcendence of national identity. She left the U.S. in the middle of the worst years of the Depression, at a moment
in history when feminist activism was at a national low point. Her departure at this

crucial moment in history must also be seen as a retreat from ideology, for the sake of her

identity. The women and men left behind in the States continued to view motherhood and

family as important stakes in the battle against capitalism for good reason: the images of

suffering innocents and struggling mothers, then as now, provided a means of speaking to

people across lines of race, class, and ethnicity. The power of such imagery is clear in the

most famous work of proletarian fiction, John Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath*. In that

work, the Joad family serves to register the barbarity of oppression as attacks against the

integrity and goodness of the nuclear family. As Ma Joad says, late in the novel, after she

has taken charge of the family in exodus: "Use' ta be the fambly was fust It ain't so now.

It's anybody. Worse off we get, the more we got to do"(Steinbeck 606). The final image

of the novel, when Rose of Sharon gives milk from her breast to feed a starving stranger,

extends the humanism symbolized by the nuclear family to encompass all oppressed

Americans as one large family.

In contrast to images created by leftist authors within the U.S. that often make

eyour humanist appeals using metaphors of family and motherhood, Smedley's text

emphasizes the figure of the daughter. To be a daughter, in Smedley's text, is to inherit a

legacy, although by focusing on the reception of that legacy rather than on the

promulgation of it, the metaphor of family loses its patriarchal specificity. Rather than

focusing on the human cost of capitalism, which in American fiction is foregrounded in

the use of images of childhood innocence, Smedley focuses on her own self as daughter,

indicating the degree to which her narrative emphasizes the importance of inherited rights

and responsibilities. Specifically: to be a daughter of the earth is to partake in a natural
legacy that is oblivious to the distinctions and prejudices of more nationalistic formulations. The mystical passages of *Daughter of Earth*, which describe Marie/Agnes communing with nature alone in huge open spaces, attest to a genuine advance in feminist formulations of resistant subjectivity. Redressing earlier accusations of the unnaturalness of the non-conforming, mannish woman, Smedley repeatedly invokes a bond between a strong, resistant female subject and a larger sense of place within a natural world.

The narrative begins with a series of images, descriptions of feelings, and subjective impressions from Marie's early childhood. From her perspective overlooking a gray sea, Marie recollects colors that take her back to the blue patches of her mother's quilts and the red of the hearth fire of her childhood, and recounts an upbringing of poverty and hardship. The opening section is ostensibly documentary realism, with a frank tone addressing the reader, moving through early events with a brisk pace more akin to journalism than memoir. But there are hints, within the language, that what we are reading is less a recollection than a literary creation. When Marie declares, "I shall gather up these fragments of my life and make a crazy quilt of them," her practice is less an act of remembrance than of creation(8). The sense that Marie's story is more fiction than memoir is supported by her admission that "It has been one of the greatest struggles in my life to learn to tell the truth"(12). Indeed, at several points early on she insists that we take her at her word. After relating a fantastic episode, Marie claims, "How he heard the tale, if no one was left to tell it, he failed to relate. It did not matter--to him, as to me, fancy was as real as sticks and stones"(63).
The definition of truth described by such statements define Marie as an unreliable narrator, a point that some critics have ignored. Barbara Foley advises readers of *Daughter of Earth* to consider it as a narrative based more on reality than on language:

> The principle of coherence shaping the text thus derives from the narrative's close correspondence to the events of Smedley's own life; the text is not patterned on Marie's development as a novelistic "character." (Foley 291)

Indeed, this seems to be Smedley's intent. "What I have written is not a work of beauty," she tells us, by way of introduction: "It is the story of a life written in desperation, in unhappiness"(7). Rather than focusing on the degree to which *Daughter of Earth*'s coherence as a narrative relies upon an extra-textual reality, I will focus upon the text as a product of the forces of ideology and identity. This interpretive shift leads away from the biographical details of her actual life--a topic already fruitfully covered in Janice and Stephen MacKinnon's *Agnes Smedley: The Life and Times of an American Radical*--and refocuses on the intellectual context within which the genesis of the text occurred.

Chapter Two argued that Robert Cantwell's strike novel *The Land of Plenty* figures ideology and identity as antithetical poles defining an ontological spectrum:

- ideology
- objective
- public
- machine noise
- identity
- subjective
- private
- orality

In Cantwell's propagandistic novel, the two terms are mutually exclusive; In Smedley's text the terms merge. This overdetermination (identity producing ideology, ideology producing identity) is a symptom of Smedley's unwavering connection of the personal with the political. Her identity--her masculine persona, her international network of
friends and fellow activists, her decision to remain solitary throughout her life—all reflect ideological commitments she has made. Her ideology, including her resistance to authority, her championing of the marginalized and the oppressed, and her socialist sympathy, likewise reflects her early life, whose hardships led her to adopt these views.

One way to unravel the conceptual overlap of ideology and identity in Smedley's narrative is to look at a corresponding overlap between two central theorists of the two concepts: respectively, Marx and Lacan. In *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, Slavoj Žižek finds common Hegelian roots between the schools of Marxism and psychoanalysis. Covering a range of cultural phenomenon from Saint Augustine to punk rock, Žižek combines Lacanian psychoanalytic theory and Marx's theory of commodity fetishism. His text makes clear the extent to which ideology must be considered as not only a trait of objective knowledge but also a trait of subjectivity. Ideology as defined by Žižek is a belief that is central to the same processes of signification that facilitate the making of identity. In particular, Žižek discusses the importance of what he calls the "rigid designator." A brief discussion is required to explain the importance and relevance of this term to the work at hand. Žižek's text begins with the Kantian phenomenological paradigm that there is no thing-in-itself beyond the mind's conception of it. The key pattern for all of human cognition of the world is that of subject and substance. This dichotomy does not exist in the world itself but is the product of the act of perception. The subject observes, then realizes that there is a split between the observed object and the observing subject. This pattern replicates, thereby building a world through chains of signification that continue to divide all observed phenomenon between subject and substance.
Such a model might appear to leave no room for the content of ideology, insofar as that term implies an objectivist discourse, i.e. a set of true or false statements describing the state of reality. Phenomenological approaches to consciousness, after all, are concerned to isolate the formal aspects that create consciousness, and require the bracketing off of empirical content. But in Žižek's theorization ideology is more than just a set of ideas, and cannot be reduced to belief systems or intellectual discourses. If that were the case, rational subjects would be able to resist them, but history has shown that this is not the case. Ideology often exists and perpetuates itself in defiance of arguments or experience that one would think could potentially disprove it.

Žižek's theory locates the power of ideology to persist and hold sway over rational subjects in the figure of the rigid designator. This term, also called the point de capiton, or upholstery button, is the crucial ideological operation, insofar as it attempts to capture the potency of the Real and attach it to a particular signifier. In the phenomenological structuring of the world into subject and substance, the rigid designator refers to "what is 'in an object more than the object"'(Žižek 97). Žižek's example of this is the slogan "America, this is coke . . . the real thing"(96). The rigid designator functions like an upholstery button pulled taut at a quilting point, fastening the signification of a pure signifier onto an historical reality in order to imbue that reality with identity and ideological meaning. The sort of identity that is accomplished through this quilting action is two-fold: imaginary and symbolic. The former type describes how the subject imagines him/herself to be conceived. The latter type describes the perspective from which such as identity would be recognized.
"Marx 'invented the symptom' (Lacan)" writes Žižek, and it is that concept which unites these two thinkers(21). The connection goes back to Kant's theory of reason. Kant's philosophical project was to isolate the processes of pure cognition from empirical content. Toward this goal he developed his system of categorical imperatives, which sorted cognition into a priori and a posteriori knowledge. The former precedes our cognition, while the latter is the substance that gets sorted, as it were, by the cognitive frames--which Kant call schemata--which "pre-wire" human perception.

Kant differentiates between synthetic and analytic a priori statements. Synthetic statements are true because they assert something about the world. For instance, "all cats are red," would be a synthetic statement. It is true insofar as the language asserts a truth that could potentially be proven wrong. Analytic statements describe a truth that precedes its utterance, such as "all cats occupy space in three dimensions." It is impossible to disprove such a statement, because the concept of cat has no meaning outside of the description of it asserted in the analytic statement. This is the sort of knowledge that interests Kant, and his work attempts to ascertain if there are any true analytic a priori statements. Such statements would be examples of pure reason, universally applicable, and they would remain true in light of all possible applications of them to experience.

Kantian pure reasoning, then, would reside outside of the world of experience. Marx's theory of commodity exchange similarly relies upon a standard of measure that exists outside all possible applications. According to Marxist value theory, the historical development that occurs when societies move from feudalism into capitalism involves a shift from exchanging items that possess individual use-values to a barter system of exchange, where items take on exchange-value relative to one another. The next
historical shift is to a single standard, money, which creates a measure of value that cuts across exchange values. Value is abstracted in the figure of money, in a way that Žižek claims precedes Kant's formulation of pure reason. This is a scandalous realization, because Kant claimed that the categories of pure reason preceded experience, when in fact they existed as rules of exchange before they were rules of physics. For reason to be universally true, it has to be a priori. So its inner-world existence radically questions its universal status, and casts the entire possibility of a universal reason into doubt.

Marx discovered the symptom, Lacan claimed, in his investigation of the development of capitalism from feudalism. When commodities take on meanings that appear inherent to them, then human relations begin to appear as free and unconstrained by the demands of society. But in the objects we perceive there remain symptoms indicating that we are in fact controlled by heterogeneous forces and that our actual condition, far from being a state of freedom and self-determination, is actually one of domination and servitude. The symptom reveals a discrepancy between the stated meaning of a universal concept and the way it actually functions.

Marx invented the symptom when he conceived of ideology as false consciousness, always in the case of someone else, to which that person was oblivious, but which another could point out. No one thinks of his or her own thought as ideological; it is always something that one perceives in someone else. Ideology exists beyond any individual. Ideology is not so much a case of incorrectly perceiving reality; rather it is a case of acting in a certain way despite the fact that we realize that we are acting based on illusion. The difference between ideology as seen from its historical materialist definition as opposed to its Lacanian one is that the former sees it as a partial
view that obscures aspects of the larger totality, whereas the latter sees it as "a totality set on effacing the traces of its own impossibility" (Žižek 49). The way that identity functions ideologically is found in the specificity of its form. Žižek discusses how two separate types of identification are at work in the process of subjectification:

Ego-ideal: symbolic identification

Ideal-ego: imaginary identification

These two forms interact dialectically. The ideal-ego is an idealized reflection of the subject, while the ego-ideal is the perspective from which such a recognition is made. It is through the construction of these two reflections that the codes, systems, and meanings we use become coherent. Moreover, the relation between these two perspectives--one's idealized view of oneself, and the assumptions and values implicit in the perspective from which such a view is formed--provide the terms of Žižek's explanation of ideology as a product of identity, as well as an influence upon it.

These two trajectories of identity are relevant to *Daughter of Earth* insofar as they foreground the extent to which Marie Rogers is not just an idealization of Agnes Smedley, but is an idealization formed in dialogue with an audience imagined and embodied in the structures of language through which she tells her story. *Daughter of Earth*'s strength as a testimony of experience obscures the fact that it is a record made after the events have concluded. The text bears traces of a Lacanian "effect of retroversion" in which the message being created through the recollection of past moments in fact is creating a system of meaning whose formal structure is distinctly that of her mature authorial identity (Žižek 102). Žižek writes that "the effect of meaning is always produced backwards, après coup" (101). In an attempt to clarify the "radically
contingent process of retroactive production of meaning" he presents a graph of Lacanian desire in language(101).

![Graph of Lacanian desire](image)

FIG. 1 graph of Lacanian desire

In figure 1 the pre-symbolic intention ($) cuts a path backwards in time to intersect with the signifier at two distinct points. The utterance "sews the meaning to the signifier," returning a split subject [I(O)](Žižek 102). Applied to Daughter of Earth, this graph describes the use of Smedley's personal history as a narrative that is subsumed by an ideological point de capiton that codifies the meaning of the narrative's plot in relation to a larger, master-signifier.

By the late twenties, Smedley was conversant in many aspects of philosophy and politics. Living in New York City and working as an activist, she learned the tenets of historical materialism, the imperialist history perpetrated by the British Empire, and America's long history of class oppression. A high level of culture was exchanged in Smedley's cosmopolitan circles, with discussions of Nietzsche and Schopenhauer, and Smedley absorbed many ideas from German Idealism(Smedley 284). The strongest influence in the design of Smedley's life story, however, was the Freudian concept of the psyche.
Smedley underwent psychoanalysis in 1923 "to discover how her attitudes towards women and sex had been formed" (MacKinnon 94). There were two stages. She described the first in letters to her American friend Florence Lennon as a short spell of sessions involving, at one point, hypnosis, undergone in the practice of an unknown psychiatrist. The sessions concluded after the psychiatrist attempted to seduce Smedley.

The second stage took place with Dr. Elizabeth Naef at the Berlin Psychoanalytic Institute. Shortly after beginning treatment, Smedley wrote to Lennon:

I have a deep castration complex which colors all my relationships. I gained the earliest impression that I was made into a girl by my penis having been cut off! Someday I'll be able to relate many interesting things to you. You may, however, get some light on my contempt for women as a sex and at the same time my bitter feminism. Likewise my lifelong man-ishness. (Nov 27 1923, qtd. MacKinnon 91)

The doctrines psychoanalysis that Smedley undertook with Dr. Naef brought a scientific lexicon to bear on Smedley's sense of self. In a later letter to Lennon she wrote:

I hope analysis will free my mind from my idea (of very early origin) that anything in books represents the god-like, and that [anything] in myself represents the vile... As my doctor says, I am more or less dominating and masculine in mind and character. [She] says I have forced my way through three generations of culture in 31 years, and in the process I have hidden, repressed, and suppressed every tendency which seemed to belong to a... lower characteristic of human nature. Nor do I agree with you that my castration complex [means simply] that "I have wanted a penis and have made Chatto suffer because he had it and I did not." The psyche is not so simple, as you must know, Florence. It has not been a "want of penis," it has been the impression that I have been left a half person, and I have tried to make up [for that] in other ways. (Jan 19 1924, qtd. MacKinnon 93)
These passages are laden with the implications of Freud's model of the psyche. Culture has replaced nature, repressing it and burying it deep in Smedley's unconscious. The sexual economy that Smedley defends may not be simply a "want of penis," but it is phallocentric, attributing unidirectional power to the masculine father. Smedley describes the "earliest impression" of a primal scene of castration.

*Daughter of Earth* creates a narrative of Smedley's childhood that is rife with elements of the classic oedipal family drama. Her earliest memories evoke a household "of angry voices and weeping" (Smedley 40). As a young girl she overhears her parents having sex:

One night I was awakened by some sound and I turned uneasily. It came again. It left me lying, tense with a nameless fear, my eyes closed, yet trembling in terror. An instinct that lies at the root of existence had reared its head in the crudest form in my presence, and on my mind in engraved a picture of terror and revulsion that poisoned the best years of my life. From that moment the mother who was above wrong disappeared, and henceforth I faced another woman. Strange emotions of love and disgust warred within me, and now when she struck my body she aroused only primitive hate. (Smedley 17)

Primal hatred for her mother is accompanied by worship of her father--"His word was enough for me--I obeyed"--and the need for his approval, as well as to be equal in his eyes to her brother George (17). When Marie enters adulthood, the archetypal memories of her mother and father continue to haunt her. One gray dawn, she spots a raving figure who upon closer inspection turns out to be her father, walking the streets in a drunken stupor. He is hardly recognizable, a phantom of his younger self. In a dreamlike sequence, Marie returns with him to his hovel, where he lives with Marie's two brothers,
George and Dan. He reappears, as Barbara Foley has observed, in the symbol of the belt-buckle worn by a rapist (Foley 301):

"You belt buckle--it is silver, inlaid with green and red, isn't it? Or is it the firelight?" Some memory was haunting me.
He was bending very close.
"Are you interested in my belt buckle?"
I sat staring back and up at him, hearing my jeering voice reply: "I am not interested in anything about you!"
But something had weakened within me even as I jeered, and I was confused. (Smedley 292-3)

In this image and others, her father evolves into a permanent symbol of brutality and sexual violence. In all of Marie's adult relationships, masculinity is associated with strength, responsibility, and power, whereas femininity is associated with weakness and submission. This gender economy is essentialized in the novel to the point that those who do not possess the conventional characteristics innately--the mannish woman, or the effeminate man--are seen as anomalies.

A large portion of the narrative is dedicated to interpreting education as a form of seduction. The most influential role models for Smedley--the ones that draw her further into her identity as a dedicated activist--are without exception figures of seduction. The many relationships described by Marie range across a spectrum of varying phenomenological ratios of self and other. Early on she recognizes that her desire exists in the real beyond her. She makes the Proustian observation that "Where I am not, there is happiness" (Smedley 35). When Marie's relationships fail--and they inevitably do--it is the result of exceeding her perceived definition of self:

The man I loved and who loved me gazed at me like that, and I knew that to him I could do no wrong. It is a terrible thing, that expression; for it means that the individual is lost,
submerged in another, whether he wills it or not. (Smedley 105)

The Other is rife with attraction and revulsion, promising fulfillment but also threatening obliteration.

Marie's earliest boyfriends are frontier cowboys. To Marie, they embody the same domestic imprisonment as her parents' relationship, and early on she dedicates herself to study in hopes of avoiding becoming the next generation's miserable wife and mother. The threat of domesticity is apparent in her early relations, for instance, with Jim Watson, the "lean, lanky," ranch hand, or Big Buck, who gives her her first gun(108). Marie quickly loses her taste for brawny frontier men, turning instead to Bob, a "high class" city man with soft hands(114). When this relationship fails, she turns to teaching, a practice she considers to be the opposite of sex. While working as a teacher, she recalls: "Of sex I thought not at all"(125). Her next romance moves further yet from the sexual binarisms of gender, as she begins a long-distance relationship of letter writing with Robert Hampton, a city fellow in the East who mails her books of "history, literature, botany"(128). Marie describes him as "ideal," a "God"(130). She spends time with another drab intellectual man enigmatically referred to, in honor of his favorite color, as "the brown editor"(148). These relationships take Marie further into self-exploration and articulation. Her choices and the rejections she delivers upon her lovers propel her further, pushing her further into study, albeit with no instrumental goal in mind. She desires "to study . . . what I didn't know . . . just study"(176).

Entering adulthood, Marie experiences a dramatic change in the way she understands the link between knowledge and sexuality. Throughout her adolescence, sex was Marie's reality--it was the cause of her suffering at home, and the determinant of her
future. Knowledge, by contrast, provided a possible alternative. Entering adulthood, she achieves a position as teacher that transplants her from frontier to urban culture, and with this move comes a change in her epistemology of sex and knowledge.

The first relationship that she experiences after this shift exemplifies her new paradigm of sexualized knowledge, akin to the sexual meaning of knowledge in the biblical sense, in which to know is to have a bond of physical intimacy. This romance, arguably the most complicated one in the novel, evokes the most desire from Marie. It begins in Phoenix, where she meets Karin Larsen, a "Scandinavian goddess . . . with golden hair, blue eyes, and the hint of an accent in her speech"(182). Marie quickly becomes enamored with Karin, "a teacher with no respect for teaching"(183). Shortly thereafter, she meets Karin's brother Knut, and her bisexual desire for the two of them leads her further into the world of knowledge, testifying to the extent to which knowledge becomes, for Marie, a signifier of desire.

Marie exoticizes Knut and Karin Larsen, fixating on their accents, and is influenced by their subversive use of knowledge. They use the cultural capital of their education to critique the structures of education. Knut and Karin embody a blend of masculine and feminine characteristics "tender and still not weak"(185). Her love for them and their world of "light . . . ideas . . . thought" send her further into "work, money, study"(183). The sexual fascination they elicit from her serves as an example of the Žižekian, senseless traumatism that furthers her own sense of identity. They embody the future version of herself in a way that is beyond her articulation of that desire. Karin and Knut offer the possibility of another world for Marie, and tempt her to join them with their demythologizing knowledge.
Marie's unconsummated relationship with Karin and Knut is eventually displaced by her marriage to Knut. Their more traditional relationship takes root, significantly, in the Arizona desert, the landscape that Marie intimately associates with her sense of self. When she is alone with Knut in the desert, she describes a Cartesian unification: "A great peace swept through my body and mind"(187). Throughout the narrative, landscapes serve to objectify inner states for Marie, and in particular the desert reminds her of the turmoil of her siblings' lives, such as the fate of her brother George, whom she thinks of when she considers the desert's gray emptiness. Her "marriage without sex" to Knut will soon end in failure, but at their wedding she experiences the ceremony as another conflation of sex and knowledge. During the ceremony, the minister speaks of "visscissitoodes." Marie does not know this word, but imagines that it "has something to do with sex"(196).

When her marriage to Knut fails, Marie returns to study, a sublimation of her sexual energy. But she fears that the act of study will strip her of her youth and vigor: "At night I buried my head in books and studied until my brain whirled and the night took my youth, my health, and sweetness and gentleness"(208). Sex, too, is associated with a draining solitude, "the shadow of dark wings"(216). In the wake of her failed relationship with Knut, Marie resigns herself to controlling her emotions instrumentally: "Then my mind that worked so tyrannically over my spirit began to draw that veil of suppression and forgetfulness down over the desire to love and the need for tenderness"(219). After that, all of her love interests are with foreign men. But beforehand, she pays a visit to Robert Hampton, the man with whom she corresponded earlier in the novel, who started her on her educational path. She expects "a distant hero--surely the tall, dark man who
smiled grimly"(228). Marie feels a lustful thrill in anticipation of the meeting. When she finally does meet him, however, he is no more than "a little man with a black derby hat and a long-sleeved coat"(229).

Through her relationships, Marie acquires the knowledge that knowledge is another form of exchange, like money for men and sex for women. She writes, "the girls had to be virgins, the men had to have money"(167). In New York City, the social nature of knowledge is finally clear: "they used books critically, skeptically, comparatively"(239). Disillusioned of her view of knowledge as a panacea to social injustice, she realizes that there are different kinds of knowledge, and that many so-called radicals and socialists use knowledge for their own private ends. Describing the urban intellectuals she meets, she writes:

Many of them belonged to those interesting and charming intellectuals who idealize the workers from afar, believing that within the working class lies buried some magic force and knowledge which, at the critical moment, will manifest itself in the form of a social revolution and transform the face of the world. (240)

She realizes, also, that she is not among the ranks of these intellectuals: "I was but a worker, but they had time to study theory"(260).

The fictionalization of her life story leads Smedley to an account that emphasizes social conditions, attributing causality to her early childhood experiences and her family, using Freudian models of subjectivity that encourage her to seek the roots of her adult pathologies in early primal scenes. The Freudian understanding she articulates in Daughter of Earth allows her to critique positive aspects of identity but not gender. As a result, Smedley can articulate a critique of the subject positions that she has occupied without ever taking into account a more essential lack that precedes subjectivation. But
this inability to go "beyond gender" is not a defect of her writing style, nor is it a
shortcoming of the genre she has chosen, the fictional autobiography, by which to explain
her life. To the contrary, the genre allows an epistemological fluidity, a liberation from
categories of true and false, that allows her to dramatize the subjective experience of her
recollected life more vividly than would otherwise by possible.

What does limit Smedley's account of herself through the figure of Marie Rogers
is her insistence that the truth of her life and the impetus of the narrative precede their
articulation. Throughout the narrative, Marie makes dogged reference to her non-fictional
status. But this is finally incoherent. "I was not a character in a novel," writes Marie, who
is, nonetheless, a character in a novel(156). Her inability to accept that her identity is
"mere words," her vehement deferral to the authority of experience, show that even the
fictional autobiography, a genre that can tell the truth, as it were, unconstrained by the
constraints of an undiverted realism. This is because gender identity occurs at a level
before language and naming: it is not an imaginary relationship; it is one that exists in the
Real. It occurs at the point where language's explanatory abilities expire at an impasse
untraversable by signification. In "Sex and the Euthanasia of Reason," Joan Copjec
suggests that the attempt to contemplate sex "throws reason into conflict with
itself"(Copjec 16). Copjec examines the Kantian model of reason, which functions by
way of antinomies, such that rational thought is comprised of binarisms of either/or
statements. For instance:

\begin{tabular}{ll}
A & Not A \\
\hline
The universe is infinite. & The universe is finite. \\
\end{tabular}
According to Kant, reason can fail in two possible ways: dynamically (qualitatively) or mathematically (quantitatively). The first failure of reason occurs when neither statement is true. In the case of the above example: the universe is NEITHER infinite NOR finite. The second type of reason's failure occurs when both statements are true: The universe is both finite AND infinite. In Copjec's argument, these types of failure account for Lacan's formulation of gender. Lacan's infamous claim that there is no such thing as woman is based on the fact that gender exists within signification in male and female categories that correspond to the Kantian categories of possible failures of reason, aligned as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>dynamic</th>
<th>mathematical</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>qualitative</td>
<td>quantitative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>masculine</td>
<td>feminine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>both true</td>
<td>neither true</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Lacanian psychoanalysis, the phallic division of gender works by the same logic. Copjec writes that "male and female, like being, are not predicates, which means that rather than increasing our knowledge of the subject, they qualify the mode of the failure of our knowledge" (Copjec 25).

Far from mistakenly essentializing gender, Smedley's life story shows the degree to which gender inevitably resurfaces even as the conditions of her life radically changed. From her early expectations of a future as a frontier mother to her later status as cosmopolitan world citizen-activist, Smedley remained bound by gender even as she challenges every other aspect of identity. This is finally what it means to be a daughter of the earth. She is not a daughter of America, nor of socialism, revolution, or the subaltern. No positive identification delimits her sense of self. She inherited a subjectivity that
precedes and exceeds her understanding of it. Smedley had to accept certain impasses that her self-understanding could not traverse. But within those limits, she questioned inequality and injustice with rationalism and a pragmatic ethical sense of self. The limits she confronted in the course of her life were not the limits of abstract reasoning but of actual conditions. Within the realm of reality, and within the constraints of her undeconstructed sexual identity, she lived a life remarkable for its idealism and its praxis.

The raw emotional pain that pervades *Daughter of Earth* gives the lie to more recent co-optations of gender and sex. In our present moment, gender seems an ideal signifier for the marketing of virtually any commodity. Feminist values have been shown to be co-optable for any political ideology, as exemplified by the camera-ready "diversity" of the Bush White House. In *The Conquest of Cool*, Thomas Frank describes the sixties advertising trope of a female model, the "rebel girl," dressed in tights and a turtleneck, aiming an antique weapon whimsically. This ad's banalization of the resisting female subject reflects the larger arc of the standardization of realism in the United States during the twentieth century. Although Smedley's proletarian text lacks the literary finesse of the more visible and obvious classics of literary modernism, the rough and bitter texture of her writing and her refusal to look away from the fascism and soul-killing domination of capitalism make *Daughter of Earth* a text that reminds us that, outside of the shifting theory and rhetoric of women's studies, an alternative lineage of resistance and self-figuring continues, even in the darkest times.
Chapter Four
Standardized: Literary Leftism, Modernity, and Stereotypes of the Depression

The vamp, the national hero, the beatnik, the neurotic housewife, the gangster, the star, the charismatic tycoon perform a function very different from and even contrary to that of their cultural predecessors. They are no longer images of another way of life but rather freaks of types of the same life, serving as an affirmation rather than negation of the established order.

Herbert Marcuse

Looking at the literary leftist culture of the Thirties, the most glaring signal of the historical distance between then and now is the stance that Thirties leftists took towards mass culture. Compared to the appropriating and reinscribing patterns of postmodern cultural consumption, the reactions of the Depression left to their contemporary mass culture seem naïve and passive, using stereotypes of family and nation in non-distancing, unironicized adaptations. Considering the gambit of types that appear in Thirties leftist fiction, from brawny-chested proletarian leaders and red-sashed revolutionary girls, to the repressed bankers and the impotent bourgeoisie, literary leftists appear to have enthusiastically and uncritically embraced mass cultural forms. Their liberatory discourse of class struggle is founded on a problematic acceptance and use of hegemonic discourses of identity. The uncritical use of a folksy populism in some works of Thirties literary leftism attests to an unfulfilled need for critical distance. European Marxists--Bertold Brecht with his epic theater, Walter Benjamin with his critical toolbox--were able to create defamiliarizing effects that called mass cultural forms into question. American literary leftism struggled to do the same, in a dialectic between ideology and identity, but often failed to synthesize the two oppositional views of the relationship between consciousness and culture. As a result, many works of literary leftism are predominantly
ideological or identitarian, but only some totalize and form reconciling syntheses that represent society both subjectively and objectively.

The Thirties was a decade during which mass culture evolved, as Rita Barnard has recently pointed out, from an entrepreneurial phase that produced projects like Charlie Chaplin's films and George Herriman's Krazy Kat comics, to a corporate phase that implemented Fordian management techniques and the rationalization of all aspects of production. Throughout the Thirties, the culture industry was "standardizing its products and consolidating itself as a vast oligopoly" (Barnard 13). The Thirties witnessed the introduction of "the motion picture, the radio, the weekly photo-newsmagazine, installment buying, the five-day work week, suburban living, and . . . the self-service supermarket" (16). Innovative technology amplified a new image-driven culture that reduced human experience to a set of formulas and stereotypes, and replaced the moral and philosophical ambiguities of modern life with a set of simplifying aphorisms. Looking at the literary production of Thirties leftists, there is a clear struggle being waged against the encroachment of mass culture.

The most resistant instances of fiction were those that were able to critique standardization. Nathanael West's three major novels diagnose the effects of mass culture's replacement of experience with entertainment. The characters in these novels, flattened caricatures of humanity who both think in and are described with imagery of mass culture, defy the central American myth of the autonomous individual living in a free society. I examine Steinbeck’s works, in contrast, as texts that leave many aspects of hegemony largely uncritiqued. Steinbeck enlists hegemonic tropes, such as the sanctity of family and the universality of morals and ethics, as a means of understanding political
issues. Without West’s radical style of deconstructing hegemony, Steinbeck’s paradigmatically Popular Front-era works instead fall prey to it, thematizing family relationships and appealing to notions of innate human decency and reason. Despite the strong, distorting effect that standardized identity had on modernist leftism, both in its fiction and its criticism, there is a discernible continuity between the leftism of the Thirties to the cultural criticism widely practiced at present in the academic humanities.

The project of tracing an intellectual genealogy from the "classic" American Marxism of the early decades of this century to the present is not impeded by a paucity of historical resources. To the contrary, the Thirties was a period in which myriad experimental literary genres that flourished briefly were captured in equally ephemeral regional journals such as Anvil, Broom, Blast, Leftward, Hammer, Proletcult, as well as the larger journals such as New Masses, Partisan Review, and Left Front. Critics and readers then and since have listed many overlapping genres of leftist fiction from the decade, including journalistic reportage, the ghetto pastoral, the proletarian bildungsroman, the social satire, the bottom-dog stories of the homeless, the fictional autobiography and the strike novel. Some works are clearly marked as leftist by their overt themes and assertions. One need read no further than the title of Clara Weatherwax’s Marching! Marching! before confronting a leftist call to direct action. Other works, however, have only topical relevance to the organizational efforts of the left. The incongruity between the works that were topically leftist, i.e. workerly, compared to those that were thematically so, i.e., thought-experiments exploring philosophical and social theories, make them seem so different as to question their shared positions as exemplars of literary leftism. Some of the ghetto pastorals and worker
narratives are entirely apolitical. They focus on the identity of those presently categorized as working class, without conception or, apparently, hope of revolutionary social change.

There are many examples of works from the Thirties that have been put forth as exemplary leftist texts solely on the grounds of their focus on working-class life. Josephine Herbst's Tresler family trilogy, Tom Kromer's *Waiting For Nothing* (1935), and Edward Dahlberg's "extremely influential" *Bottom Dogs*(1930) are all examples of novels whose relevance to present-day themes and concerns of the left is obscure(Booker 74). Despite their reputation as didactic, many leftist novels written during the Depression, although ripe with leftist connotations and implications, lack any clear political direction.

Henry Roth's *Call It Sleep* (1934), which Walter Rideout called the decade's "most distinguished single proletarian novel," recounts the story of a poor immigrant family living in the Lower East Side of New York(186). Full of large stretches of phonetically-approximated spellings of various city dialects, the novel evokes a cacophony of immigrant voices and borough accents. But in all that noise, there is no ostensible leftist political content. Roth, who joined the Communist Party shortly after the novel's publication, wrote that he did not want the novel to "illustrate or reflect the massive class struggle that was going on at that time"(qtd. Foley 324). The book's apoliticism was an issue debated in the 1935 issues of the *New Masses*. Refuting charges that the novel was "introspective and febrile," Edwin Seaver defended it, and asked rhetorically:

Should little David Schearl have joined the Young Pioneers, a non-existent organization? Should David's working-class father have been a socialist when he wasn't? Should the
author himself have turned Jehovah and moved history forward to satisfy a critic? (qtd. Rideout 190)

Seaver's remarks defend realism as the honest style of the author, with the political topics of direct action conceived as critical impositions that threaten to corrupt the text. Seaver expressed the view that was also held by Mike Gold, and that spoke for many leftist intellectuals of the time, when he described the practice of realist narrative as in and of itself a revolutionary act.

James Farrell's *Studs Lonigan*, which critic Donald Pizer has called the "archetypal Thirties novel," tells the story of an Irish-American boy growing up in the South Side of Chicago (Booker 109). As with *Call It Sleep*, the three novels of the Studs Lonigan trilogy contain political themes within a style of naturalism. Excepting a brief "Red parade," and a communism-espousing Greek waiter, the books never address the issues of social organization and direct action associated with the left. Instead, the focus is on the titular hero, Studs, a victim of the times whose debauched state attests to the brutal social conditions of urban poverty. The implicit argument that the case of Studs dramatizes is reformist, pointing out the need for social programs to remedy a system that creates subjects like him. But this critique remains rooted in structures of individual identity. M. Keith Booker writes: "When politics do arise in the novel, it is generally in a rather marginal way, largely because the trilogy concentrates on the point of view of the politically naïve (and almost totally inarticulate) Studs"(111). The trilogy's adherence to a realist logic makes it unable to provide any positive direction forward for the left.

Many leftist authors wrote novels focusing on industrial labor. Novels set in factories--Albert Halper's *The Foundry*, Robert Cantwell's *The Land of Plenty*, and Myra Page's *Moscow Yankee*, to name a few--include industry-specific jargon and description.
In much leftist culture of the Thirties, the veneration of the working class focused on industrial labor in particular. There is a sensed gap, for Thirties leftists, between industrial, "hands-on" labor as opposed to their own intellectual work. Like Marx’s labor theory, which defined oppression as the physical process of extracting labor from bodies, American leftist culture tended to focus on hard industrial labor as a synecdoche for all work. The image of the rugged industrial worker is part of a legacy of virile, masculine representations of the working class. The American left, from the Wobblies to the teamsters, has always had a syndicalist character that has overshadowed the critical aspects of Marxist thought.

Literary leftists venerated the worker for having a deeper understanding of the capitalist system as a result of his/her toil in the system. Henry Hart writes in the introduction to the 1935 American Writers' Congress (AWC):

The day in the life of a man who spends nine hours in front of a punch press or on a ship has more reality, more beauty and more harmony than you will find in all of Park Avenue with its boredom, its waste of time and its quest for joy that doesn't exist. (Hart 15)

Hart's claim bears a common-sense truth: The suffering of the working class reveals more about the nature of American society than all the conspicuous consumption of Park Avenue. However, this assertion carries with it an extensive lineage of aesthetic theory, binding beauty and truth together in the classic Romantic formulation that English poets imported from German idealism in the nineteenth century. Hart's remark, simple on the surface, can analyze bourgeois culture as false by an aesthetic model that posits society as a potential totality. It is within this notion of totality that the description that can account most truthfully for the world is the most beautiful one.
Splitting their efforts between scholarship and more directly political activities, leftist intellectuals during the Thirties generally did not have the opportunity to reflect on the deep historical moorings of their strategies. They were unable, for the most part, to undergo the extensive philosophical reading necessary to contextualize many of Marx's arguments, and they had no exposure to the most vital Marxist debates of the decade that were taking place in Europe. Notwithstanding the Americans' ignorance of them, the early writings of Georg Lukács reflect many of the issues and views expressed by American leftists of the same period. With the exception of Sidney Hook, virtually no one read Lukács in America during the Thirties. In retrospect, this seems regrettable, because Lukács's Hegelian explanation of the proletarian as the "driving force" behind history explicitly articulates many suppositions that equally informed the American view of the working class as the central mechanism of revolutionary change (Lukács 68).

Compared to the innovations of his contemporaries, such as Brecht, Benjamin, or Gramsci, Lukács' ideas appear less groundbreaking, and he himself acknowledges that his writing offers no major innovation past the classic writings of Marx. Compared to Gramsci's development of the concept of hegemony, with its insights regarding the changing grounds of modern intellectual resistance, Lukács' theories on class consciousness seem dated, relying on outdated philosophical paradigms such as a strong distinction between material reality and intellectual ideas, a discernment of a coherent class-subject, and a Kantian metaphysics. Lukács developed the implications of historical materialism in culture and aesthetics, areas that the original writings of Marx never thoroughly addressed. Critics usually compare Lukács and Gramsci at the expense of the former, whose style of analysis is characterized as referentially fixed, whereas Gramsci's
theory, wise to the malleability of ideas for political ends, is flexible and adaptive. What is surprising, reading Lukács in the context of American history, is the degree to which his writings articulate the workerism that has characterized the American left. It is regrettable that American Marxists, such as Max Eastman, characterized Hegelian Marxism as obtuse, "disguised theology," because they could have found in Lukács a homology to their own syndicalist views, as arrived at through historical materialism.

In *History and Class Consciousness* (1922), Lukács makes the historical argument for the objective existence of class consciousness. In pre-capitalistic societies, the economic interests of commerce were balanced by other non-economic cultural forces, such as a genuinely interventional legal justice system. Capitalist societies commodify human labor, leveling heterogeneous values and replacing them with the homogeneous measure of exchange value. For the first time in history, the economy becomes the defining force controlling all aspects of society. This is what leads Lukács to speak repeatedly of the social totality. Lukács emphasizes that the apparent autonomy of certain realms of human life was in fact illusory: under capitalism, all values become economic.

Class consciousness appears for the first time as an issue under capitalism, Lukács argues, because capitalism required a historically unprecedented form of partial consciousness from its dominant class. In order to perpetuate class interest, the bourgeoisie must repress class consciousness, and appear to themselves and others as though their interests were balanced against those of other classes. While studies of the past required interpretation to discern the economic forces at work, the present was self-apparent. Anyone denying this objective, glaringly obvious truth was, Lukács asserted, a
victim of false consciousness, unable to see beyond the "concrete totality" and conceive the "whole" (Lukács 50). Bourgeois consciousness functions by way of its non-acknowledgement of its ownership of production. The possible sources for resistance are scant: The rural peasantry is too widely dispersed, and the urban petty bourgeoisie, although directly exposed to capitalism, imagines itself to be above all class antagonisms. The only chance for authentic class consciousness lies with the proletariat. Lukács wrote:

What is 'reflected' in the consciousness of the proletariat is the new positive reality arising out of the dialectical contradictions of capitalism. And this is by no means the invention of the proletariat, nor was it 'created' out of the void. It is rather the inevitable consequence of the process in its totality. (Lukács HCC 204)

The early essays of Lukács are torn through with a contradictory treatment of the concept of objectivity. His argument is a carefully reasoned analysis of history that defends its claim that the proletariat is the driving force of human progress with an explanation that Lukács insists is objective, and yet the truth of his assertions are, he admits, contingent on the future success of "the inner transformation of the proletariat" (79). These contradictions come to a point when Lukács asserts, "The objective theory of class consciousness is the theory of its objective possibility" (79). They are also apparent in his formulation of bourgeois false consciousness which, Lukács emphasizes, is not irrational or mistaken, but is rather false in not realizing the interrelatedness of all aspects of human civilization, and instead imagining that the world is a "diversity of mutually independent objects and forces" (70).

While Lukács' relationship to the future, (temporarily ex nihilo,) revolutionary proletariat is unambiguous, his relationship with the actual, existing proletariat is less so. The state of working-class consciousness in Europe, lacking "ideological maturity,"
compromised its ability to achieve genuine class consciousness, leaving apparently no remaining source for proletarian direction besides Lukács' own writings (76). And yet his insistence on the proletariat's unique ability to lead social change, if taken to its logical end, would nullify his own intellectual discourse as yet more bourgeois false consciousness. "The totality of an object can only be posited if the positing subject is itself a totality," he writes in "The Marxism of Rosa Luxemburg," and "only classes can represent this total point of view" (28). The limits of Lukács' social critique are indicative of the limits of ideological critique in general. Although ideological critique--the unmasking of so-called objective claims by the revealing of their specific interests--can deconstruct the beliefs and values of the dominant class, it cannot provide any better justification for its own perspective, nor can it turn its analysis back on its own objectivity-claiming assertions.

The critical paradigms that Lukács articulated in the twenties are the same issues faced by Thirties literary leftists. The concerns with scientific objectivity, the dissonance of attempting to fuse the ethical and the aesthetic, and identification with the working class were topics of discussion in small journals and conferences like the 1935 American Writers' Congress. Although the more obvious connection of Lukács to Thirties fiction may be the shared topical focus on the working-class, a more profound connection exists in the fact that literature was still functioning, as it had been since the eighteenth century, as an articulation of Enlightenment theories of society. Thirties literary leftists still employed realism as a means of founding a critical perspective. Literary techniques such as free indirect discourse were used as imaginative means for understanding society by
entering into the consciousnesses of diverse individuals. Writing decades later, David Lodge provides an argument for this view of realism's implicit egalitarianism:

By deleting the tags which affirm that existence, such as 'he said', 'she wondered', 'she thought to herself', etc., and by using the kind of diction appropriate to the character rather than to the authorial narrator, the latter can allow the sensibility of the character to dominate the discourse, and correspondingly subdue his own voice, his own opinions and evaluations. (Lodge 49)

This description captures the progressive potential of realism, praising it in terms similar to those which Mikhail Bakhtin theorized in *The Dialogic Imagination*.

The praise that Thirties literary leftists shared with Lukács for realism is based on the belief that literature can offer a deeper understanding of the separate subjectivities that constitute society. This belief theorizes literature's function as identical to that of ideological critique. Both realism and ideological critique emerge to offer alternate perspectives, in opposition to those presumably more hegemonic perspectives provided by mass culture. But here the paradox of ideology as a concept once again arises: If realism claims an exceptional function because of its intersubjective, truth-revealing narrative strategies, then on what ground can it posit this critique? Like ideological critique, realism erases the degree to which it, also, is a socially-mediated genre. In *The Concept of Modernism*, Astradur Eysteinsson describes the model of social cohesion naturalized and reproduced by realism:

Through its language, therefore, in its very form, realism implicitly presents culture as a unified sphere and, to exaggerate slightly, reflects a fully "democratic" and egalitarian society—a society in which meaning is evenly "shared" (no matter what the actual political situation in the respective society may be). Realism is a mode of writing in which the subject "comes to terms with" the object, where the individual "makes sense" of a society in which there is a
basis of common understanding. One could perhaps say that
nineteenth-century realism consolidates as a re-creation of
the "public sphere," at a time when some see that sphere as
entering a process of fragmentation. Realist discourse is in
some ways an ideal(istic) form of what Habermas calls
communicative rationality. (Eysteinsson 195)

Eysteinsson's description of the ideology of realism calls the liberatory implications of
Lodge's praise into question. While realism unmask false consciousness, it also performs
ideological work, materializing the claims of the modern nation-state, with its self-
justifying descriptions of itself as a sovereign democracy with a common culture and a
rational public sphere.

Ideological critique, despite its value as a tool during the earlier phase of
industrial capitalism, is vulnerable to charges of economic determinism. Birmingham
critic Roisin McDonough describes how Lukács interpreted "ideology as essentially a
manifestation or emanation of the reification of commodities (which are all-pervading in
advanced capitalist society), and therefore wholly determined in a reflectionist manner by
the economy writ large"(Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies 40). In fiction, the
economism of ideological critique appears as the aesthetic problem of the stereotyped
class-subject, blind to differences of identity such as race, gender, and sexuality. Another
shortcoming of ideological critique that follows from its economism is that it leaves no
room for the possibility of change and progress at the level of the ideas. If, as modernist
Marxists like Lukács maintained, ideas reside in the superstructure and are to be
evaluated based on how true they are, then philosophy is reduced to empiricism. This
flies in the face of Marx's famous eleventh thesis of Feuerbach, which declares that the
point of philosophy is not to interpret the world but to change it(GI 123).
John Steinbeck's underrated *In Dubious Battle* (1936) provides an example of a text that uses fictional devices that enact ideological critique towards the goal of finding political solutions to the crises of industrial capitalism. The plot of the story revolves around the efforts of two Communist agitators, Mac and Jim, to organize a farm labor strike in a California apple orchard. The novel, painstakingly researched, reveals the limited ability of realist narrative to interrogate models of mass organization and direct action. The novel is ideological in its description of social causality, portraying the fate of the strike as determined by causes that are outside the influence of any individual characters. In an ingenious turn, Steinbeck applies ideological critique to the ideologues themselves, examining the organizers in psychological terms, and finding motives for their dedication to the objective science of revolution to be based on psychological and intersubjective factors. This realization is the main insight of ideological critique: that claims to objective knowledge are always invested in the subjective position of the speaker.

To argue that *In Dubious Battle* practices a fictional variant of ideological critique is to claim that the novel poses a critique against objectivity, a claim that would the defy the well-established documentary nature of Steinbeck's works. But it is important to bear in mind that a documentary work of fiction is still a fictional text, made of language and structured by imagination. Steinbeck did in fact visit strikes and interview participants, but his representations were never bound to that research. In *The Grapes of Wrath*, Steinbeck researched Filipino and Mexican migrant farm workers, although the migrants in the novel appear de-ethnicized, converted into white Oakies. Likewise, in *In Dubious Battle*, the head organizer of the workers, Mac, is critically different from the researched
individual that he was based on. Unlike his real-life equivalent Pat Chambers, who said in an interview, "you don't try to build an organization at [the workers'] expense," the fictional Mac is willing to sacrifice individual workers, even strikes, for the larger goals of the party (Booker 317).

Depression-era leftist theory relied upon the power of reason both as a teleological mechanism of historical progress and as a universal faculty, and the excessive optimism is an effect of dialectic theory and its critical practice, ideological critique. During the Thirties, however, even as Lukács and the American left were still mounting resistance using ideological critique, the Italian Marxist, Antonio Gramsci, was developing his theory of hegemony, which theorized a far deeper level of penetration by power into human subjectivity. Gramsci’s theory, written while he was imprisoned under Mussolini, formulates the means by which oppression and social control can continue, even after a worker-led revolution has occurred. Clearly, given his circumstances, imprisoned by a fascist government, these questions were hardly abstract.

Gramsci’s theory of hegemony measures the prospects for progress and change, given a situation where reason no longer has any claim to universality, and revolution is anything but historically inevitable. Gramsci’s work proposes a model that theorizes the way that oppression perpetuates not only in the relations of production that constitute the base of society but also within the cultural superstructure. Gramsci located two levels of domination within the superstructure. First, there is the direct domination of the state, accomplished primarily through its juridical function. The second type of domination, hegemony, occurs within civil society, "the ensemble of organisms commonly called 'private'" (Gramsci 12). Whereas earlier Marxists had focused on the factory as the nexus
of oppression, Gramsci was able to see how control is more insidiously rooted not only in the workplace transfer of physical energy to labor value, but also in the realm of private life. To Lukács' claim that proletarian consciousness was the result of the society in its totality, Gramsci adds a deeper level of analysis, writing that "human nature is the totality of historically determined social relations" (133). Whereas earlier critics had seen human nature as a bulwark against the encroaching forces of modernity, Gramsci sees it as an aspect of an already co-opted subjectivity.

The concept of hegemony introduces complications to the practice of ideological critique, accounting for the ways in which ideas, political parties, and class identities can all be used both as instruments of liberation or oppression. Gramsci's work departed from the theoretical assertion, prevalent throughout the Second and Third Internationals, that the economic realm determined all other sectors of society. In Gramsci's analysis, there are no fixed constants in the planning of revolution. No terms are sacrosanct, and no party or movement can be considered isolated from the other parties and programs with which it is in dialogue and/or struggle. Gramsci wrote:

> In the more recent period, there is a type of party constituted this time not by an elite but by masses—who as such have no other political function than a generic loyalty, of a military kind, to a visible or invisible political centre. (150)

Far from a universal class whose coming into being would end the prehistory that Marx had described leading to socialism, the working masses were deeply inculcated in the present system not only at the level of ideas and discourse, but also at the level of emotion and affect. Power was exerted upon all social classes not only during work hours, but also in those private moments that had formerly been considered the last refuge of the self.
Americans would not read Gramsci's works until decades later. Historical studies of Thirties leftist culture have recognized an important change that occurred around the middle of the decade, when leftist writers shifted focus from the Third International figure of the industrial worker, and instead began to make their appeals to "the People," a less class- and gender-specific conception that would rise in importance during the Popular Front era of the late Thirties leading into World War Two.\(^1\) Despite Frank Lentricchia's claim that Kenneth Burke, harbinger of the Popular Front, was the American Gramsci, it seems that there was no American equivalent of Gramsci in the Thirties.\(^2\) The Popular Front embrace of the populist notion of the people, in fact, seems to reverse (or abandon) strategy, submitting to hegemony and capitulating to the normative types and conservative mechanisms of mass culture.

Literary works of the Popular Front reflect a shift away from the earlier engagement with the Communist Party and its national literary counterpart, the John Reed Clubs. Instead of focusing on the culture of the working class, Popular Front works addressed a larger audience. Towards the goal of doing so, Popular Front culture foregrounded its appeal for unity in terms of racial and ethnic diversity, creating a culture which Michael Denning has described as "ethnic Americanism"(Denning 9). The shift from Third Period to Popular Front Marxism seems retrogressive both for its abandonment of a class-specific discourse and its capitulation to the spirit of nationalism that pervaded the country as it geared towards entrance into World War Two. The rise of the figure of the People and its enlistment by the left occurred within a larger social trend

\(^1\) "The Communist Party of the United States (following Comintern orders) changed its basic policy in 1935. It shifted from the strong revolutionary commitment of the Third Period to a policy of accommodation with most left and liberal constituencies and institutions as part of the struggle against fascism"(Nelson, Repression and Recovery, 159).

towards standardization. In many ways, the shift seems to affirm the Marxist formulation of economic base and ideological superstructure, with the latter reflecting the former.

Standardization had become a pervasive business practice by the late Thirties. Throughout the decade, the country had undergone a rationalization of the organizational hierarchies of business and government. This was the decade when "technocracy" entered the vernacular, the decade when Henry Ford introduced the model of the standardized worker. The nationalization of a homogeneous culture is apparent in Thirties cultural artifacts such as the Star-Spangled Banner, which was officially made the national anthem in 1931. And a growing national recognition of standardized gender roles is evident in the comic strip Blondie, a popular phenomenon of the early Thirties. Herbert Marcuse's description of the interpellating effects of mass culture in the fifties, holds true for the Thirties:

Mass production and mass distribution claim the entire individual, and industrial psychology has long since ceased to be confined to the factory. The manifold processes of introjection seems to be ossified in almost mechanical reactions. The result is, not adjustment but mimesis: an immediate identification of the individual with his society and, through it, with the society as a whole. (Marcuse 10)

Marcuse's description pinpoints the mechanism by which standardization disarms larger social problems and converts them into a series of internalized, personalized ones. The immediate, automatic identification that standardization facilitates obscures the diverse and heterogeneous conditions of cultural production. What was actually "the product of a sophisticated, scientific management and organization" appears as an easily-recognizable constellation of formulas, character-types, and a social model rooted in the ethics of small-town family life(Marcuse 10).
During the Thirties, standardization of human behavior is apparent in all realms of American culture and society. Its source is clearly the radio and film industries, whose technological ability allowed the amplified broadcast that spanned the nation with a simultaneity of reception that further bolstered a sense of unity. Historian Robert Warshow has described how the film industry replaced the emotional contents of experience with "a system of conventionalized 'responses' that reduced politics to a form of mass entertainment"(Pells 267). By manipulating formulas with predictable responses, filmmakers in the Thirties were able to provide an escape from the hard times of the Depression, but at the expense of the possibility of representing the complexity of human lives. Richard Pells, in Radical Visions and American Dreams, writes that "The very nature (and appeal) of popular culture often centered on its ability to translate the difficulties of human life into false patterns and easy stereotypes"(Pells 267).

Despite the critiques and resistances that leftist literary writers and critics waged against the encroaching stereotypes of mass culture, the possibility of resisting them, or creating a culture that did not engage them, increasingly dwindled. Accounting for Thirties literature's tendency to mix high and low culture, Pells writes: "During the 1930s writers were attracted to mass culture as part of a general fascination with the customs and attitudes of the average man"(Pells 266). Thirties writers wrote to an audience they abstracted into the general figure of the average person--the "man on the street" as he is hailed during the decade. Clearly, there was an interest in writing accessible works. This interest entailed the use of the representations that were familiar to most everyone, even the illiterate: the image-driven stereotypes of mass culture.
The imposition of standardization that came with the integration of mass culture into literature was not anathema to the pre-existing patterns of national identity that existed in fiction. In *Our America*, Walter Benn Michaels provides a theory of the historic development of identity that begins, roughly, at the end of the First World War. Michael's book offers an account of the way that the national political discourse of pluralism led to reformed views of cultural identity. Looking at American modernist texts from the twenties, *Our America* examines the shift during that decade from the Progressive-era concept of identity based on race to a new concept of identity based on culture. Instead of hailing the pluralism that arises during the twenties, Michaels sees the new cultural definition of identity as a perpetuation of the racial logic of difference. An example he gives of this is *aficion*, the affection that arises between Jake Barnes, Hemingway's hero in *The Sun Also Rises*, and other men. In that novel, Robert Cohn, the Jew, is never ostensibly shunned in racial terms. Instead, he is shown to lack something culturally. Michaels writes: "*Aficion* thus takes its place alongside niceness as another name for breeding. It may be 'spiritual' but, like breeding, it is manifest in bodies"(28).

An important feature of the new collective national identity of the twenties, Michaels argues, was its replacement of a moral framework based on universal goods and evils with one that instead derived all values locally, from community networks and groups. Foremost among these networks was the family. Michaels writes that "it is the family that provides the indispensable model for the new conception of American identity"(40). Democratic pluralism thus leads people to act not according to experience but rather according to an identititarian definition of who they are acculturated to be, "by deriving one's beliefs and practices from one's cultural identity instead of equating one's
beliefs and practices with one's culture" (16). Works are "identitarian," Michaels claims, when they cohere together as assertions of the American identity. The identitarian claim, which Michaels finds in both the fiction and poetry as well as the criticism, "expresses the priority of identity over any other category of assessment and makes clear the position of the family as bearer" of that claim (6).

Michaels traces the transformation from the Progressive era's racist discourse of pure blood to the nativist modernist discourse of a distinctly American spirit through the canon of American modernist novelists, including Hemingway, Faulkner, and Fitzgerald. Although Michaels does not discuss the continuation of identitarianism into the Thirties, his work provides a sense of the degree to which identity was already largely conceived in terms of family. It is this sense of Americanism, backed by pluralism, and centered on the family, that is amplified and standardized in the Thirties.

Family, or "Fambly," as Steinbeck's Oakie migrants would have it, appeared in leftist fiction of the Thirties as a symbolic ideal of collectivity. The biological family came to serve as metaphor for the larger family of the human race, appearing as a threatened territory in many leftist works. Such representations critique industrial capitalism for the damage it has wrought upon the family unit. Thirties leftist literature seldom included family in its critique of hegemony. With the increased presence of standardization, leftist fiction of the Thirties relied on the family as an oppositional means of identity, pitted against the encroaching forces of modernity.

The late Thirties was a period of increasing standardization, a result of modernity's Fordian and Taylorized mechanization and increasing nationalism, as witnessed by the Popular Front embrace of the People. These social forces--
standardization and nationalism--are at odds with each other. Standardization is a by-product of modernity, whose institutions demand homogeneity of language and culture from their work force. This demand led to the rise of what Charles Taylor, in his essay "Nationalism and Modernity," calls "categorical" identities, "which link us to a multitude of others nationally or even globally--on the basis of confession, profession, citizenship"(33). Such identities, integral to modernity, are at odds with "earlier ‘network’ identities, linked to family, clan, locality, and provenance"(33).

The family is a contested symbol, rife with oppositional meanings and connotations, and influenced by both nationalism and standardization. In order to better understand its importance in the formulation of identity in the Thirties, analysis needs to move from the general parameters of the decade's cultural shifts to some specific formulations, in fiction, of the meaning and cultural function of family. John Steinbeck uses the family as the central symbol in his novel *The Grapes of Wrath*. Steinbeck published the novel in 1939, concluding a trilogy of novels addressing California labor problems. The other two novels, *In Dubious Battle* (1936) and *Of Mice and Men* (1937), also examine the contradictions and injustices of capitalism. All three novels interrogate social issues but it is the final book--a book still regarded as Steinbeck’s masterpiece and a centerpiece of the American literary heritage--that uses the paradigms of network identity, most centrally the family, to deploy an ideological critique of modernity.

*The Grapes of Wrath*, praised as the paradigmatic novel of the Depression, cannot be considered apart from the earlier two labor novels. Each novel in the series approaches the social crisis of the Depression from a different perspective and genre. *In Dubious Battle* is a strike novel; *Of Mice and Men* an ostensibly apolitical working-class portrait;
and *The Grapes of Wrath* is a quintessentially modernist novel. The first two works are bound within leftist paradigms. In the case of *In Dubious Battle*, the novel’s representation of a failed California strike produces a deployment of ideological critique. In *Of Mice and Men*, the portrayal of George and Lenny, while avoiding details of organization and activism, clearly contributes to the canon of detail-specific accounts of real workers’ lives so venerated by Third Period Marxists. *The Grapes of Wrath*, however, does not self-consciously aim at being a conspicuously leftist statement. Instead, it draws from the tradition of literary modernism, combining the small-town grotesques of regionalist writers like Sherwood Anderson with the dual-narrative, interchapter structure of John Dos Passos. The novel is full of apocalyptic wasteland imagery evocative of Eliot’s poetry, and it uses Christian symbolism and the strength of the family bond as a critique of the destructive industrial forces of modern development. With such rich interplay of what are now seen as the most important social and cultural forces of the age, the novel provides an ideal text to analyze in terms of the struggle for symbolic domination within literature waged between the oppositional discourses surrounding identity.

The Joad family, arguably as bizarre a traveling family as Faulkner’s Bundrens in *As I Lay Dying*, is hardly standardized. Rather, their behavior is strange and funky—such as when Grandma Joad shoots her husband in the posterior during an argument, or beats a salesman with a chicken—and earthy—such as when Tom, fresh from prison, takes off his shoes to stamp the dust back between his toes. Tom’s parents, Ma and Pa Joad, are likewise idiosyncratic, with Ma Joad clearly the core of the extended family. Her strength is connected with her flowing nature, in contrast to the jerkiness of her husband, whose
duties are mechanical, such as fixing the truck. The matriarchal structure of the Joad family aligns their characterization with earlier leftist novels (as discussed in Chapter Three) and gestures forward to the matriarchal patterns in the works of Toni Morrison.

Steinbeck represents the effects of standardization in the novel’s descriptions of roadside life on Route 66, in the diners and truck stops the Joads pass through on their way west. In these scenes, we witness the formulaic sales pitches of used car salesmen, the everyday patter between truckers and waitresses, and regional types, such as the Texas boy who two-steps with his hair in his eyes. In the interactions between the Joads and these standardized characters, Steinbeck is able to convey a humanism. The strict waitress who refuses to sell them a half loaf of bread is moved by the sight of the starving children, Ruthie and Winfield, and gives them free penny candy. The regional types, too, are portrayed with a humanism and sympathy that forges a human bond.

The confrontation between labor and the fascist businessmen and politicians of California had already been explored by Steinbeck in *In Dubious Battle*. That novel, however, is devoid of family, relying instead upon the unifying potential of class consciousness. The strike’s failure in *In Dubious Battle* is shown to stem from the loss of moral bearings that occurs when the workers stop thinking of themselves as individuals and instead take on a group mentality, diagnosed by Doc Burton, a sympathizing medical doctor, as "Group-men." He tells Mac, the Communist organizer:

> Group-men are always getting some kind of infection. This seems to be a bad one. I want to see, Mac. I want to watch these group-men, for they seem to me to be a new individual, not at all like single men. A man in group isn’t himself at all, he’s a cell in an organism that isn’t like him any more than the cells in your body are like you. (144-5)
The mentality of group-men leads to chaos when the forces of police and government close in at the end of the novel, and Mac nearly loses his own life to the worker mob. In the final sentence of the novel, Mac himself is shown to be influenced by a callous disregard for individual life, stooping so far as to use the corpse of his recently murdered partner Jim to rally the workers at a crucial moment.

London handed the lantern up, and Mac set it carefully on the floor, beside the body, so that its light fell on the head. He stood up and faced the crowd. . . . "This guy didn't want nothing for himself--" he began. His knuckles were white, where he grasped the rail. "Comrades! He didn't want nothing for himself--" (343)

This final moment is adumbrated earlier at several points when Mac tells Jim they need something dramatic to spark the men into action. Mac's dedication to the larger goals of the Communist Party has destroyed his own individual moral compass, and he too is shown to be a victim of group-men consciousness.

Given the grim prospects for revolution based on a theoretical collective model dramatized in In Dubious Battle, Steinbeck's use of the family in The Grapes of Wrath should be read as an attempt to connect the collective consciousness required for revolution with a structure of identity already in place in the subject. Although the novel's legacy in American heritage is as a testimony to the perseverance of the American family--John Ford's famous film version emphasizes the traditional family--it is in fact better read as an attempt to expand and redefine it. When the family reaches California and enters Weedpatch they become a malleable, redefinable model for collective organization. The final image of Rose of Sharon breast-feeding a grown man with her dead baby's milk radically expands the notion of family.
Unlike Steinbeck's novels, which attempt to reinfuse and co-opt signifiers of American hegemony, Nathanael West's works confront that hegemony with a relentless critique of the humanist mythologies of mass culture. His brief career—he died at 36—produced three works that challenge three central aspects of American hegemony. An earlier work, *The Dream Life of Balso Snell*, written during the twenties and published in 1931, is experimental, with themes running closer to Dada and surrealism. Described by Daniel Aaron as "a privately printed little exercise that never should have been printed at all," this early work is less relevant to the critique of hegemony than his later works (Siegel 114). West's three later, Depression-era novels explicitly critique the banality and formulaic repetition of mass culture. In *Miss Lonelyhearts* (1933), the hero, who is only referred to as "Miss Lonelyhearts," is a male newspaper writer whose work, answering letters "stamped from the dough of suffering with a heart-shaped cookie knife," finally takes over and destroys his life (169). In *A Cool Million* (1934), West reverses the bildungsroman structure of American success typically associated with the works of Horatio Alger, and recounts the fall and demise of Lemuel Pitkin. In *The Day of the Locust* (1939), Tod Hackett moves to Hollywood only to find it peopled with characters as false as the stereotypes of the film industry in which they work. These three novels constitute a three-pronged diagnosis of American hegemony. *Miss Lonelyhearts* and *The Day of the Locust*, set on the East and West coast centers of mass cultural production, New York and Los Angeles, each critique standardization as it is perpetrated through, respectively, print journalism and the film industry. In both these novels, the focus is on the dehumanization exacted upon the producers of culture, those employed in the "business of dreams" (*Miss Lonelyhearts* 198). In *A Cool Million*, the focus shifts
away from the ravages of the system on the producers, and instead examines the contents of that culture. Specifically, *A Cool Million* deconstructs the central American myth of the free autonomous individual bounded only by his personal capabilities.

*Miss Lonelyhearts* measures the ironic distance between the simplified representations that are amplified by mass culture and the actual conditions that generate these types. Scenes are labeled with subtitles--"Miss Lonelyhearts and the Party Dress," "Miss Lonelyhearts in the Dismal Swamp,"--whose repetition of the hero's name reiterates the distance between his feminine public writing persona and his male body. The fact that we only know the protagonist by his pen name speaks to the degree to which actual experience is preceded and absorbed by cultural representations.

Contrasting the boozing and philandering of the protagonist, whose own behavior defies his social function as dispenser of hopeful advice, to the genteel persona of the advice columnist, West's novella establishes a link between the mass culture of the Thirties and the earlier cultural traditions on which it is built.

In the previous century, before the implementation of mass culture, a writer could imagine his or her audience, and address them with the possibility of a shared culture, a shared set of assumptions and beliefs about the values and meanings of their experience of belonging to a community. This literacy-enabled communal sense was locally delimited by the limits of print technology. In modernity, however, with the advent of mass distribution and institutionalized education, these limits decline. The shared types of the earlier culture remain, but without the foundation of actual shared conditions they become increasingly separated from experience. The fact that Miss Lonelyhearts is actually a man speaks to mass culture's connection with earlier nineteenth-century literary
forms like the sentimental novel, which were typically construed as women's writing, despite their genesis within male-dominated modes of production.

In contrast to the humanist sympathy projected in his column, Miss Lonelyhearts lives in an urban world full of characters that are described as mechanized automatons. His drinking buddies, fellow journalists, are described as "machines for making jokes"(188). Describing Mrs. Shrike, the wife of his editor with whom Miss Lonelyhearts is having an illicit affair, West writes: "She thanked him by offering herself in a series of formal, impersonal gestures. She was wearing a tight, shiny dress that was like glass-covered steel and there was something cleanly mechanical in her pantomime"(198). As his disillusionment increases, Miss Lonelyhearts abandons his initial, feminine writing persona, with its cheery insistence that "Life is worth while, for it is full of dreams and space, gentleness and ecstasy, and faith that burns like a clear white flame on a grim dark alter," and, cycling through various identities, explores hedonism, aestheticism, and Christian humility as possible escapes from the meaninglessness and misery of modern life.

The conversion scene that concludes the novella dramatizes the victory of standardization over Miss Lonelyhearts. Having explored virtually every possible escape route from modernity, either by actually living out the various identities discussed above or debating them into discursive dead ends with his cynical nemesis, Shrike, Miss Lonelyhearts finally learns to stop worrying and marries Betty, his sweet and docile girlfriend:

"Please marry me." He pleaded just as he had pleaded with her to have a soda.

He begged the party dress to marry him, saying all the things it expected to hear, all the things that went with
strawberry sodas and farms in Connecticut. He was just what the party dress wanted him to be: simple and sweet, whimsical and poetic, a trifle collegiate yet very masculine. (244)

His successful proposal leads him into a mystical state reminiscent of the Hegelian concept of Spirit, in which subject and object have synthesized all negations into a totalizing confluence that destroys the Cartesian distinction between mind and body:

"He was conscious of two rhythms that were slowly becoming one. When they became one, his identification with God became complete. His heart was the one heart, the heart of God. And his brain was likewise God's"(246). That moment of synthesis between individual and structure proves to be fallacious, however, and is shown to be only a reconciliation in his consciousness, as is proven moments later when a vengeful cuckold arrives and, misinterpreting Miss Lonelyhearts' sympathetic approach as hostile, shoots him.

In Miss Lonelyhearts, the effects of standardization are narrated as the tragic fall of the individual. In The Day of the Locust, the effects of standardization are shown to permeate an entire regional population. When Tod Hackett arrives in Hollywood, he finds a city full of sportswear-clad imitations of Hollywood film stereotypes, from the cowboy Earl Shoop, who is described as possessing a "two-dimensional face" and a "resemblance to a mechanical drawing," to the aged vaudevillian Harry Greener, who can no longer stop performing his self(95): "He jumped to his feet and began doing Harry Greener, poor Harry, honest Harry, well-meaning, humble, deserving, a good husband, a model father, a faithful Christian, a loyal friend"(70).

The reliance upon fixed sets of signifiers permeates all aspects of Hollywood, encompassing not only every possible facial expression or slangy utterance, but also
spreading to representations of history. The novel begins with a procession of historical armies--"the scarlet infantry of England with their white shoulder pads, the black infantry of the Duke of Brunswick, the French Grenadiers with their enormous white gaiters, the Scotch with bare knees under plaid skirts"--which is revealed to be costumed actors en route to a sound stage(21). From the over-the-hill vaudevillian, to the cowboy, the Mexican, and the sacrificial female, West evokes these stereotypes with a tragic-comic tone whose eeriness, like Tod's laugh at the conclusion of the novel, continues and turns into a shriek, building to an apocalyptic climax.

In *A Cool Million* (1934), West confronted the central aspects of American hegemony directly, taking on the hugely popular American *bildungsroman* novels of Horatio Alger in a satirization that turned Alger's typical rags-to-riches tale of honest, hard-working Americans on its head. In *A Cool Million*, the hero begins similarly, heading into New York City from a small town. Instead of success, Lemuel Pitkin finds only maiming, dismemberment, and an early death. Through a surreal comic style, the novel is able to critique many aspects of American hegemony, including sexism, racism, nationalism, and fascism. West's central target is the myth at the heart of capitalism's veneration of the free market: the free individual limited only by his own potential. More deeply than the decade's prevalent realism, West shows the absurdity of notions of free will and self-determination.

West's *A Cool Million* abandons the ideological critique that so many other authors attempted. The novel's absurdist plot and its heavy use of allegorical figures, such as Shagpoke Whipple, former U.S. president and incarceration of business evil, show the unsuitability of attempting rationally to engage or critique the rhetoric of power, with its
proclaimed virtues of freedom and prosperity, and instead mock its transparent simplicity. Lem will follow any charismatic leader who crosses his path, accepting absurd political ideas as doctrine. Despite his best intentions, he is unable to reason through the various political options that confront him, from homegrown fascism to Third Internationalist communism.

Unlike the conflation of identities towards which Steinbeck's narratives strove, West's novels do not provide final images of reconciliation and closure but rather end in death and apocalypse. In doing so, he avoided the constraining codes of patriotism and sentimental maternalism that permeate both Steinbeck's works as well as the larger cultural output of the Popular Front-era. Barbara Foley has noted that nothing characterizes Thirties proletarian fiction more than an inability to achieve closure. Equally prevalent is the inability to synthesize ideology and identity. While Steinbeck's Thirties novels resolve the tension by absorbing ideology into identity, West's novels absorb identity into ideology, finding no possible identity that is not co-optable by mass culture.

The mythology of the Great Divide is apparent in the works of both West and Steinbeck, and although both authors borrow strategies from high literary modernism, they apply them to the mass culture settings in such a way that the distinction remains clear. High cultural strategies critique mass cultural images but only by distancing themselves from those images. The ideal of proletarian fiction—to create a nuanced portrayal of working class life that simultaneously expressed the larger structures of control that engender subjectivity—was yet to be realized. The family, for all its potency as a universal symbol of human interconnectedness, remained the domain of
conservatives. Literary leftists either critiqued it as a realized practice of ideological domination or embraced it in terms whose sentimentalism disarmed the coherence of their political themes. What was missing was the discovery of a pre-existent structure of family relations that could accommodate the left's themes of solidarity against oppression. This discovery would arrive with the publication of Richard Wright's early Communist-influenced works, which is the topic of Chapter Five.
Chapter Five
The Artist's Dialectic: Race and Authenticity in Richard Wright's Early Novels

These are difficult times for all writers: there is the threat of official and unofficial censorship; publishing difficulties and general economic problems. But if these times are difficult for the writer, they are great times for literature. There are times when the laws of society are laid bare for all who would understand to see; when emotions are to be observed stripped naked. For the conscious writer these are times for intense study; times, for those who see beyond the present chaos, of great themes.

Ralph Ellison, 1941

This chapter reconstructs the debates over racial identity that arose in works of literary leftism from the Thirties. In works by black and white writers, representations of racial identity often contained essentialist arguments for authenticity. This is apparent in works that articulate, through various metaphors, the sense of an innate African-American subjectivity. In works of literary leftism, race is distinguished from class, gender, and sexuality, as an aspect of identity that exists apart from language. Evocations of a racial identity to which one could authentically adhere were based on a model not of biological but of cultural constructivism. Richard Wright's Thirties novels reflect this in his satirizing depictions of stereotypes and his linguistic formulation of intersubjective black, male identity. The radical negativity of Wright's narrative strategies align him philosophically with other literary leftists who examined the relationship between ideology and identity.

In the field of American studies, Marxism and Black vernacular culture have been perceived as discrete counterlogics to modernity. Simplistic literary chronologies have focused on the Harlem Renaissance as the primary expression of African-American modernism, and have dated its demise to the stock market crash of 1929, after which
began a "red decade" during which white political radicals exploited black writers in the
desperate times of the Great Depression.1 According to this view, the Thirties was a
period during which white Leftists took advantage of African-American writers in what
Mark Naison has called a pattern of "manipulation, disillusionment, and betrayal"(3). The
most famous scholarly book to argue against the Communists' treatment of African-
Americans is Harold Cruse's 1967 The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual, which describes
Jewish Communists "burying the Negro radical potential deeper and deeper in the slough
of white intellectual paternalism"(147).

The best-known works of African-American fiction reaffirm this version of the
history of African-Americans and the Left. Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man (1952)
represents the Left in the Brotherhood, a radical movement based on the Communist
Party, which manipulates and exploits authors for their own purposes. Brother Jack, the
scientific Marxist who heads the Brotherhood, uses women as "red date bait," as critic
William Maxwell quips, to seduce Tod Clifton and the Invisible Man and recruit them
into the organization, with tragic and fatal consequences, reaffirming the Invisible Man's
first impression that "He only wanted to use me for something"(Maxwell 128; Ellison
294). Richard Wright, arguably the best-known African-American novelist to embrace
Communism, later famously refuted it in The God That Failed (1950). Claude McKay,
the Jamaica-born poet and novelist, also famously abandoned Communism in later years.
Wright's debate with Zora Neale Hurston looms figuratively large in pervasive views
about the negative influence that Communist ideology exerted over African-American
writers. Wright's novel Native Son exemplifies Communism in the figures of Jan Erlove
and Boris Max, the defense lawyer whose impassioned yet unsuccessful legal defense

argues that Bigger is important because he is a social "test symbol" (354). *Native Son*, along with Ellison's *Invisible Man*, are canonized classics of African-American fiction that make the case for the separation of Communists and African-Americans.

A closer look at the critical debates and literary output of Thirties leftists will show that writers of the Left had, as William Maxwell has noted, a conflicting and contradictory relationship to the Harlem Renaissance as well as to African-American culture in general. Recent works by William Maxwell (1999), James Smethurst (1999), Suzanne Sowinska (1996), James Miller (1996), Barbara Foley (1993), and Gerald Horne (1993), have challenged the view of the Communist Party as user and betrayer of the African-American cause, recovering the long-standing ties and mutual influence that bonded the Left together with the struggles of African-Americans. These studies have emphasized the necessity of contextualizing the Thirties within its framing decades.

William Maxwell argues that the view opposing the Left and African-American writers ignores the support given to young Black writers by the Communist Party and its literary counterpart the *New Masses* during the repressive years following the First World War. The support was reciprocated, Maxwell argues, in the positive changes that took place in Communist Party formulations of race throughout the decade, and is also apparent in the proletarian fiction of the Thirties. James Smethurst, in *The New, Red Negro*, a recent study of leftist African-American poetry of the Thirties and forties, emphasizes the importance of looking past the 1939 Hitler-Stalin Pact to understand the literary yield that resulted from the interactions between African-Americans and the Left.

Smethurst asserts that "when African-American literature drew from 1930s Communism, it tapped a partial product of its own legacy" (8). During the twenties and
Thirties, the Communist Party supported and promoted the careers of many upstart young writers. The Harlem Renaissance poet Countee Cullen, for instance, published poetry in the *Daily Worker*. Bill Maxwell writes that: "Working-class Harlem internationalists impressed by both the Russian Revolution and a local pro-Soviet left forged links between African-American writing and the Old Left" (6). He describes how leftist publications provided a readership for African-American writers, encouraging them to mix high and low culture in an unprecedented way, moving past the "intellectual" perspective embodied in paradigmatic works of the Harlem Renaissance such as the work of Paul Laurence Dunbar and Claude McCay, and representing African-American working life from a popular cultural perspective.

Sowinska and Foley directly challenge the view of communism's negative influence, rereading novels by black and white authors to reassess earlier critics' dismissals of Communist solutions to what the country then referred to as "the Negro Question." Looking at strike novels written by women in response to the Loray Mill Strike in Gastonia, North Carolina, in 1929, Sowinska reads the novels of Mary Heaton Vorse, Myra Page, Fielding Burke, and Grace Lumpkin as a dialectic progression toward a developing awareness of race and racism, moving from the abstract platitudes of masculinist ideology to an experience-based narrative style that can explore the complicated interactions required to form cross-racial alliances. Foley responds to earlier critical characterizations of the Communist Party of the United States (CPUSA) as categorically opposed to African-American folk and vernacular culture, showing how Third Period efforts enlisted those cultures towards revolutionary ends. She concedes that the Communist Party's race policy, a contradictory amalgamation of integrationism and
nationalism, led Party-affiliated critics to apply simplistic criteria to works by or about African-Americans, praising them to the degree that they dramatized integrationism. But she emphasizes that African-American writers, in spite of such criteria, produced novels that dialectically synthesized many contradictory aspects of race, making her case by focusing on the works of Richard Wright and William Attaway.

The Communist Party's policy on race during the Thirties was set forth at the 1928 Sixth Congress of the Communist International. At the congress, a split arose between American delegates, blacks and whites, who wanted to define African-Americans as an oppressed race, and a group of Russian delegates, joined by several African-American delegates, who set forth the policy that would finally prevail, to define African-Americans as a "nation within a nation" (Foley 174). This policy derived from a Stalin-authored plan designed to suit the geopolitical conditions of diverse Soviet republics. In *Marxism and the National Question* (1913), Stalin defined nation as "a historically evolved, stable community of language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a community of culture" (ital orig. Stalin 12). The Soviet model, applied to the United States, resulted in the Black Belt thesis, which directed the CPUSA to regard the states that comprised the Black Belt, i.e., all the southern states whose population was at least half African-American, as a separate nation. This view led James Ford, the African-American CPUSA vice-presidential candidate what ran alongside William Z. Foster in 1932 and 1936, to call for a "Soviet Negro Republic" in the southern states in 1935 (Horne 204). Although the nationalist aspects of the Communist's race policy dovetailed with the goals of conservative white segregationists, the actual effects of this policy were liberatory and activist. Several
generations of life under Jim Crow laws had created a segregated society. In
acknowledging that African-American experience was distinct, culturally and
psychologically, from the unmarked national culture of whites, the Black Belt thesis led
to the implementation of open-ended programs that reached out to black fellow-workers
and organizers in the South, gaining notoriety among Alabama racists as the "nigger
party" (Foley 177). It also encouraged Communists to appropriate aspects of southern
African-American culture, resulting in remarkable hybridizations of evangelical and
revolutionary discourse, such as the "Lenin spirit" Montgomery Communists recounted
having experienced as they prayed before meetings (185).

Despite positive contributions made by the Communist Party in the struggle
against racist oppression, their theories of race had some serious drawbacks. Despite the
rhetoric of the Black Belt policy, many communists remained committed to the notion
that commodification—the conversion of human labor into value for capitalist
exploitation was the central aspect of oppression. Despite the nationalism of the
southern policy, the CPUSA thus remained focused on class-based analysis, viewing race
as epiphenomenal to the struggle against capitalism. This is evident in the integrationism
of the CPUSA's direct action projects in the North. It is also evident in the aesthetic
criteria of New Masses critics such as Eugene Gordon, Walt Carmon, Mike Gold, and
Eugene Clay, all of whom favored integrationist works over "racialist" works, their
category for works that focused exclusively on black culture.

In sum, the CPUSA's approach to race during the Thirties was conflicted. The
centrality of race in the Comintern platform during the Third International directed
American communists to fight racism in the campaigns waged in the North. On the other
hand, the integrationist biases that influenced the party's aestheticians attests to the limits of any resistant political theory that fails to account for the deep roots of identity. Through the rhetoric of the Black Belt policy, nationalism was a conceptual means of translating the specificities of African-American oppression into an economic problem.

In his essay "Marxist Theory and the Specificity of African-American Oppression," Cornel West discusses the Black Belt policy as an example of one of the four major ways that the Marxist tradition has mishandled race relations in America. He critiques the Black Belt policy's "ahistorical racial determination of a nation, its flaccid statistical determination of national boundaries, and its illusory distinct black national economy"(20). Taking pre-Gramscian Marxism to task for its "ostrichlike" logocentricity, West argues that ideological approaches fail to understand identity's complex, unsystematizable nature(25):

white supremacist logics are guided by various hegemonic Western philosophies of identity that suppress difference, heterogeneity, and multiplicity . . . these philosophies of identity are not simply ideologies but rather modes of domination with their own irreducible dynamic and development. (23)

Ideological critique is beside the point, West argues, when the models of identity that inform them are extra-ideological, and implicated in the structures they attempt to resist. Racism perpetuates within modes of domination whose materiality defies rational correction, calling for a psychological approach that can account for the aporias, silences, and gaps that, more than any rational ideology, perpetuate racism.

There is a tradition of African-American writing that has developed the notion of an invisible aspect to race consciousness through the trope of double consciousness. In *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), W.E.B. Du Bois wrote:
It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (2)

Du Bois's famous and precise turn-of-the-century description of the psychological processes at work in the formation of race consciousness is the first articulation of a symbol that will be articulated throughout the century. In *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance*, Houston Baker Jr. describes African-American double consciousness as a minstrel mask, a symbol that represents racism and hidden resistance as the constitutive dialectic of African-American identity. Two oppositional strategies for African-American writing derive, based on the acceptance or rejection of the mask as a means of expression. The first strategy, the "mastery of form," is epitomized by Booker T. Washington, who affirms the "master's nonsense," using "darky jokes" and stereotypes as "strategies of attraction" for white patronage(56, 29). The second, the "deformation of mastery," is characterized by Du Bois and Paul Laurence Dunbar, who refrain from the stereotypes of folk vernacular, instead confronting whites' nonsensical understandings of Otherness with acts of creative deformation.

The double consciousness embodied in the symbol of the mask reappears in literature through the century, in Jean Toomer's *Cane*, Ellison's *Invisible Man*, and more recently in the writings on nation and colonialism by the Antillean psychologist Franz Fanon, whose *Black Skin, White Masks* examines the effects of the colonial gaze. The conflict embodied in the image of the mask, as described by Houston Baker Jr., between consenting and resisting the dominant hegemony, reinvokes the dialectic between
ideology and identity that marks many works of literary leftism. Just as Agnes Smedley, Max Eastman, Robert Cantwell, John Steinbeck, and Nathanael West produced works that bear traces of the conflicting discourses of ideological critique and identitarian essentialism, the works of African-American writers reveals an ongoing conversation on the "fluid and always interdependent relationship between deformation and mastery"(68).

Although the political propaganda of the CPUSA emphasized black nationalism and self-rule, the literary leftism produced during the Thirties was less ideologically resolved. In earlier chapters, this dissertation examined the way that works of literary leftism reproduced the dichotomy between private and public life by positing a realm of family life within which behavior was free from interpellation, in contrast to the workplace realm, where behavior was closely regulated. Works by Jack Conroy, Robert Cantwell, Tillie Olsen, and James Farrell, among others, dramatize the performed aspects of workplace life, while portraying the private sphere as less prescribed. Proletarian fiction sometimes succumbed to idealizations of the working class, following the Lukácsian tendency to locate hope for social change in the revolutionary potential of the working class. These works implicitly argue against the deforming influence of modernity by portraying the damage this influence has exerted over natural family life.

Works by African-American leftists radically question the division between authentic and performative behavior. Despite calls from New Masses editors for the authentic voices of the working class, and despite the Communist ethnographer's Lawrence Gellert's 1931 assertion that "Negro culture is perhaps the most genuine workers' culture in America," the fiction and poetry produced by African-American leftists such as Richard Wright, Langston Hughes, Sterling Brown, and William Attaway
deconstructed the authenticity of racial identity on both sides of the color line (qtd. Foley 184). This view of the performativity of all aspects of human behavior, with its accompanying delegitimation of the concept of authenticity, is an example of Cornel West's claim that African-American racial identity both responds to and negates traditional Western philosophical models.

The Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor articulates the values of a moral Western tradition in *The Ethics of Authenticity*. Taylor traces the concept of authenticity back to the writings of Rousseau, who formulated it as an inner moral sense that arose to challenge earlier moral codes prescribed by social status. Taylor links the Enlightenment ideal of self-authenticity to the birth of the modern sense of identity. He writes:

> This is the powerful moral ideal that has come down to us. It accords crucial moral importance to a kind of contact with myself, with my own inner nature, which it sees as in danger of being lost, partly through the pressures towards outward conformity, but also because in taking an instrumental stance to myself, I may have lost the capacity to listen to this inner voice. (29)

This view of an inner self that is preserved from the pressures of instrumental reason represents, like Matthew Arnold's Victorian definition of culture, a bracketing off of the determining aspects of social fields in order to posit the possibility of a legitimate claim to an objective moral compass.

The perseverance of this sense of an inner source of authenticity is apparent in Harlem Renaissance narratives of racial passing, such as Nella Larsen's *Passing* (1929) and Jessie Fauset's *Comedy: American Style* (1933). The first African-American work to describe the phenomenon was James Weldon Johnson, whose 1912 novel *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* described the experience of passing as a white
man. Larsen and Fauset's works explore racial politics through light-skinned black female characters, "tragic mulattoes," who forsake their upbringings and reinvent themselves as whites. Passing narratives are politically ambivalent, both posing a challenge to a certain essentialist form of racism--the biologism that assumes that any percentage of black blood contaminates pure white blood--while reasserting a culturalist theory of racial identity. Walter Benn Michaels understands passing as a component of the larger shift in which "biology is supplemented by behavior, race is supplemented by culture" (Michaels 122). He writes: "In general, it is the possibility of passing that will locate race 'deep down inside'" (116).

Nella Larsen's *Passing* examines the psychological complexities involved in passing. By telling the story of Clare Kendry from the perspective of Irene Redfield, Larsen's novel is able to focus on the processes of Othering that are required in order to construct race as a set of cultural traits. Clare mirrors Irene in an erotic relationship characterized by uncanny moments of identification. When they first meet, Irene is deeply impressed by Clare, finding her "incredibly beautiful" and describing her as a creature, utterly strange and apart, with caressing eyes (69, 79). When she first sees Clare after many years in Chicago, Irene experiences a "small inner disturbance, odious and hatefully familiar," and there is a strong sense that Irene at once identifies with and is repulsed by Clare (18). Clare writes to tell Irene that she has spurred a "pain that never ceases" (8). This identification between Clare and Irene derives from their mutual ability to cross the color line. Irene's disgust towards Clare reflects her discomfort regarding her own complicity with the strategy of passing.
The psychological focus of Larsen's *Passing* formulates race as an effect of an economy of intersubjective gazes and projections, transferences and countertransferences. While aspects of *Passing* seem quickly assembled, such as the facile characterizations of Gertrude and Brian, or the melodramatic settings based on coincidence, the attention that has gone into creating Irene's ambivalence makes her interpretation all the more crucial: Does the narrative corroborate her essentialist view of identity? Or, alternatively, does the narrative critique this view?

In order to distinguish herself from Clare, Irene finds symptoms of an essential difference that eludes articulation. These differences are first understood as symptoms of sameness, as Irene reflects that despite her self-redefinition, Clare retained "ties . . . which, for all her repudiation of them, Clare had been unable to completely sever"(90). Irene's memories of the old Clare take on a racial dimension. She thinks of Clare's eyes as "Negro eyes! Mysterious and concealing"(46). In the novel's second section, Irene increasingly thinks of Clare in terms of racial characteristics that have persevered past her cultural self-redefinition. Clare's "innate lack of consideration for the feelings of others" surfaces in the "polite insolence . . . that she had always had," and she possesses a "soft malice, hidden well away"(81, 18, 7). These differences are located beyond articulation, as extralinguistic interpersonal dynamics lurking beneath the "smooth surface of talk," that become increasingly apparent to Irene (75).

*Passing*’s narrative constructs a complex framework of psychological projection. The novel's themes disrupt the coherence of the protagonist's perspective. Irene's mental instability, revealed in the repressed violence of the novel's final moments, calls into question all that she has recounted beforehand. Clare's innate qualities lead to the tragedy
at the end of the novel. Irene's discovery that Clare has been cheating with Brian, her husband, reinforces Irene's earlier conclusions about Clare's vestigial blackness. Irene's murder of Clare occurs in a psychological trance that allows her to disavow responsibility for it, but it is a calculated act, one conceived to restore order from the chaos that Clare's passing has provoked.

According to critic Ann Ducille, *Passing* is "very much Irene's story," and neither the subtext of lesbian desire between Clare and Irene nor the affair between Clare and Brian can be verifiably proven to have existed beyond Irene's imagination. In her essay "Blue Notes on Black Sexuality," Ducille argues that *Passing* cannot be decisively fixed by any single reading, praising the novel's multiple meanings as proof of its deserved status as a classic. Ducille challenges the critical tendency to focus on the blues as the central aesthetic form of African-American culture. Taking issue with the work of Hazel Carby and Houston Baker Jr., Ducille claims that such studies of, in Baker's term, "blues energy," have focused on legendary blues singers like Ma Rainey and Bessie Smith and have failed to consider cultural expressions of female sexuality that defy the monologic construction of American blacks as "southern, rural, and sexually uninhibited"(423). Ducille challenges the definitions of "authenticity" and "the genuine" that vernacular critics have associated with blues culture, and finds feminist alternatives in the novels of Larsen and Fauset.

Despite Ducille's claim that the novel is best interpreted as a sort of phenomenological record of Irene's perspective, the cultural constructivist aspects of the novel are not exclusively Irene's. It is only by questioning the key events mediated through Irene's perspective--the desire between Irene and Clare, the relationship between
Brian and Clare, and her murder by Irene--that the novel can be read as most importantly "Irene's story." This reading pays insufficient attention to the lack of stylistic distance between the sections from Irene's memory, in comparison to the unmarked narrative sections. By refusing to read the novel as "Irene's story," the social constructivist logic of the novel becomes clear. The retributive justice meted out by Irene in her confused state neutralizes the threat of instability that Clare's act of passing brings with it. Clare dies because, despite her attempt to redefine herself, she is still who she always was, an aggressive force that threatens to disrupt family relationships with unrestrained sexual desire.

Richard Wright's fictional work from the Thirties provides an alternate take on authenticity. Whereas Larsen's *Passing* reinvoked racism through social constructivist models, Wright's narratives are less concerned with the psychological processes that create racism, and more concerned with the violent confrontations that manifest it. In this aspect, as in many others, the influence of Marxist thought is apparent in Wright's work. By describing the acts rather than the consciousness of the racist, he is focusing on the material, rather than the superstructural, elements of the social whole. This is not to say that Wright never uses a language of interiority, or avoids psychology, but rather that he views racism as impervious to rational analysis. Understanding it is not a matter of deconstructing the psyche, but of realizing the brutal reality of American racism.

The fictional works produced by Richard Wright during the Thirties satirize facile conceptualizations of authenticity. In *Native Son*, the white leftists Jan and Mary, for whom Bigger works as a chauffeur, instruct him to take them to "a real place"(69). Once there, they order fried chicken and ask Bigger if their slang is correctly articulated. For
Wright, the whole idea of representing black identity authentically is ideological. The model of racial identity that Wright developed in the three works that he produced during the Thirties—*Laud Today!* (written 34-35, published posthumously in 1963), *Uncle Tom's Children* (1938), and *Native Son* (1940) all suggest that African-American identity is invisible and incoherent within the white hegemony of capitalism. Rather than revealing a set of essential traits and tendencies, Wright's interrogations into racial identity unveil a model that is adaptive and contingent, adumbrating later Lacanian formulations of race as interstitial, defined by absence and invisibility more than any psychological dynamics or unavoidable destinies.

*Laud Today!* recounts a single day in the life of Jake Jackson as he travels through Chicago from home to his post office job, then out for a debaucherous night with his friends Bob, Al, and Slim. The novel is set on Lincoln's birthday, and radio transmissions, paying homage to the Great Emancipator and praising his liberation of the slaves, punctuate the day's events. These transmissions fall on the ears of Jake but barely register among the many messages of mass culture that permeate the narrative. Similar to works by John Dos Passos and Nathanael West, Wright's novel is full of ironically juxtaposed, surreal descriptions of mass culture, including advertising circulars, moral tracts, political pamphlets, off-color limericks, song lyrics, movie posters and newspaper headlines. Throughout the novel Wright emphasizes the distinction between mass culture and popular culture, portraying the former as abrupt intrusions into the day's events, full of bombastic religious and nationalist rhetoric. Popular culture, the body of stories and songs that have persevered from the south, spurs their thoughts, makes them laugh, and reminds them of their shared identity.
Lawd Today! divides into two separate realms: that of Jake at home, with his wife Lil, where he behaves violently and psychotically, and that of his friends, among whom he becomes a contributor to a multivocal consciousness. The narration describes the communal voice that arises between the four men:

their common feelings were a common knowledge. And when they talked it was more like thinking aloud than speaking for purposes of communication. Clusters of emotion, dim accretions of instinct and tradition rose to the surface of their consciousness like dead bodies floating swollen upon a night sea. (158)

Wright's description of his subjects distances him from them, analyzing them in modernist terms that align him with the paleomodernist T.S. Eliot, whom Wright quotes in an epigraph in the novel. Like Eliot, Wright's portrayals describe modernity as a lifeless abyss in which the rich cultural traditions of the past have withered. The four male characters in Lawd Today! navigate the day through collective responses to the phenomenon they encounter. The title, an exclamation repeated throughout the text, combines a signifier of vernacular speech with an exigent reference to the present, hinting at the dichotomy between authenticity and symbolic usefulness that Wright's future works would deconstruct.

Lawd Today! resembles James Joyce's Ulysses in its use of a single-day frame (February 12, 1932) and its modernistic inclusion of mass media voices, as well as its evocation of a communal voice that often abandons tagging the dialogue of Jake, Bob, Al, and Slim. Wright does not borrow Joyce's technique of multiple sources of consciousness, instead relegating the novel's perspective to that of Jake. Also unlike Ulysses, Lawd Today! does not provide a comprehensive scan of Chicago in the way that Joyce did with Dublin. This difference may be best explained by the vast cultural
differences between the two cities. Wright's narrative reflects a dedication to realist representation that bears the imprint of his friend and fellow-Chicago School novelist James Farrell. Like Farrell's *Studs Lonigan*, Wright's *Lawd Today!* adheres to the conventions of naturalism, drawing from Wright's own experience as a postal employee to create the novel's setting. The debased fun--whoring, gambling, playing bridge, getting drunk--framed by the disturbingly violent scenes of spousal abuse, result in a disjunctive and nihilistic work which, like Farrell's *Studs Lonigan*, can diagnose the emptiness of worker-consciousness but hesitates to name a positive course forward.

While Wright's first novel avoids engaging issues of authenticity, his next labor, a collection of novellas published as *Uncle Tom's Children* in 1938, directly confronts racial stereotypes and typical signifiers of authenticity, shifting from the urban proletariat of the North to the rural folk of the South. Manifestations of mass culture dwindle. With the exception of the white traveling salesman from Chicago selling graphophones, mass culture makes few intrusions into the rural culture that Wright evokes in stories of white brutality and black reaction. As with his first, unpublished novel, the stories in *Uncle Tom's Children* evokes racial identity through vernacular speech. As critic Jack Moore has noted, in Wright's imagined South, all Blacks speak a southern-black dialect, while all whites, regardless of class, speak standard English. Despite its cast of rural black characters, Wright's portrayal of the South is significant for what it lacks: Namely, a folk mythology, like that created by Zora Neale Hurston. Wright's stories portray no fictional hope, as Hurston did in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, published the year previously (1937), in her evocation of the all-black Florida town of Eatonville.
Wright reacted against what he called Hurston's literary minstrel show in a famous scathing review of her novel. His own novel refused to imagine a Utopian solution to the social problems of the day. Instead, Wright again takes a naturalist strategy and attempts to describe, through fiction, the apocalyptic events leading up to white on black violence. As Sarah, a character from "Long Black Song" puts it: "White men killed the black men because they could, and the black men killed the white men to keep from being killed" (*Uncle Tom's Children* 147). Wright's choice of setting--the Jim Crow South from which he himself had migrated when he was 18--establishes an expectation of the fulfillment of certain conventions. Wright thwarts these expectations in *Uncle Tom's Children*. Rather than avoiding the conventions of black identity through a radical negation of all possible formulations of it, as he did in *Laud Toddy!* Wright uses established types--a range of racist white myths about African-Americans--in a reinscribing strategy that bridges the gap between essentialism and constructivism.

The characters that appear in *Uncle Tom's Children* fit the criteria that some vernacular critics have used to define authenticity insofar as they are poor and rural. The stereotype most directly defied is that of the over-sexed Negro, which Wright overthrows in several of the stories. In "Big Boy Leaves Home," another quartet of black males appears, similar to that of *Laud Toddy!, but this time they are in the South, and instead of sexually objectifying black women, this quartet is itself observed by the gaze of a white woman. When Big Boy and his friends emerge from skinny-dipping in a river and confront a white woman, the result is fear and confusion, leading to the killing of Big Boy's friends Lester and Buck by the woman's gun-toting companion Jim, whom Big Boy kills during a scuffle. This scene of gazing differs acutely from those of Larsen's *Passing.*
While in Larsen's novel, the gaze reveals dynamics of identity that escape language, the
gaze in Wright's story reveals nothing, and the moments leading from the encounter to
the murders is an escalation of missteps and misinterpreted reactions. This scene makes
clear that the lynching that Big Boy witnesses later of his friend Bobo does not affirm the
stereotype of a libidinous black male, but rather the pathological sexuality that projects its
own sick paranoia onto the community's blacks. In Passing, violent confrontation is
arrived at through a gaze of recognition, whereas in Uncle Tom's Children, the gaze
registers misrecognition.

In "Long Black Song," Sarah, a young black mother, has a sexual encounter with
a white salesman from Chicago. The day after, having found the salesman's hankerchief
in the bedroom, Sarah's husband Silas confronts him and is killed, but not before himself
killing one of his white attackers. This story seems another instance of reversing the roles
of the myth of the black rapist. But such a conclusion ignores the ambiguous eroticism of
the sex scene. The imagery depicts an experience that mixes pleasure and pain:

A liquid metal covered her and she rode on the curve of
white bright days and dark black nights and the surge of
the long gladness of summer and the ebb of the deep
dream of sleep in winter till a high red wave of hotness
drowned her in a deluge of silver and blue that boiled her
blood and blistered her flesh bangbangbang . . . (137)

No simple reversal or replacement, Wright's eroticization of rape signals a departure from
conventions of realism. As Silas reacts with horror and fatal resolve to his wife's sexual
liaison, the ambiguity of the act remains unresolved. Sarah believes the choice to have
been hers, blaming herself when Silas's life is threatened. The problematic nature of a
rape scene in which the victim blames herself entirely, in a way that the events of the text
seem to defy but the progression of the narration seems to endorse, signals a shift from realism into a symbolic register.

Several aspects of "Long Black Song" evoke Jean Toomer's fictional sketches in *Cane* (1923): Sarah, with her "sweet ache which . . . was stealing back to her loins now with the silence and the cricket calls and the red afterglow" resembles Toomer's Fern, whose strange eyes, at sunset, absorb and reflect the whole countryside "with the soft listless cadence of Georgia's South"(Wright 128, Toomer 17). The green cornfield--significant as the place where Sarah had earlier cheated on her husband, as well as the space where she will hide when Silas confronts the white attackers--is a symbolically charged space that resembles Toomer's cane fields. Another resemblance appears in a quartet of black men in "Big Boy Leaves Home" whose dialogue creates a language-based community. This form is integral to "Cabnis," Toomer's story in which a Northern black writer encounters three rural southern black men, and the four constitute a representative dialogue between different views on race identity.

The similarities between Wright's proletarian fiction and the works of Jean Toomer attest to the degree to which the Harlem Renaissance and the literary leftism of Thirties are connected as part of a continuous resistant tradition. Rather than abandoning the folk vernacular tradition, an accusation made as recently as Robert E. Washington's 2001 *The Ideologies of African American Literature*, Wright engaged stereotypes of race. This aligns him with the more symbolist and mystical aspects of the Harlem Renaissance. Some critics have interpreted the existentialism of Wright's later works as

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2 "Wright never envisioned black American ethnic culture as a viable source of meaning and order in black American life"(Washington 164).
proof of a nihilistic sensibility that was always present in his work.\textsuperscript{3} Others have seen Wright's work as an instance of what Houston A. Baker Jr. calls the "phaneric allaesthetic," that rhetorical chest-beating bravado of writers who refuse the master's nonsense\textsuperscript{(51)}. These approaches fail to recognize Wright's dramatizations of communal conversations, his citations of spiritual lyrics, and the prevalence of popular culture in his narratives, all evidence of his search for a cultural racial identity.

Wright's most memorable characters are simultaneously realist and symbolist. In "Long Black Song," the visit from the salesman is a plausible realist plot frame, but on reflection his presence in the deep South is strange, quite a journey from his Chicago base, suggesting that his identification with Chicago is meaningful as a symbol. The violence and death his ambiguous rape brings resonate symbolically as an indictment of commodified culture--the graphophone he peddles--marketed from the North to the South. And Sarah's reaction, despite its troublesome evocations of stereotypes of the sexually-libinious black body, symbolizes the soft violence of cultural domination, and its ability to seduce its victims.

Wright creates stereotypical characters and then thwarts readerly expectations by undercutting the reality of those types. Jean Paul Sartre praised Wright for his double-voiced discourse:

\begin{quote}
 each of Wright's works contains what Baudelaire would have called "a double simultaneous postulation"; each word refers to two contexts; two forces are applied simultaneously to each phrase and determine the incomparable tension of his tale. Had he spoken to whites alone, he might have turned out to be more prolix, more didactic and more abusive; to the negroes alone, still more
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{3} See Michel Fabre, \textit{The Unfinished Quest of Richard Wright}, trans. Isabel Barzun (New York: William Morrow, 1973.)
elliptical, more of a confederate, and more elegiac.
(qtd. Gilroy 146)

Sartre's praise repeats Du Bois's formulation and reflects, also, the dual-approach race platform of the CPUSA. The other stories in Uncle Tom's Children reaffirm Wright's confrontational strategy of reinscribing genteel, pastoral images of southern black life. The double-voiced discourse that Sartre praises is, in its addressing of whites, characterized as "abusive." This harshness distinguishes Wright from other users of vernacular images. Wright's works are multivocal, leading different critics to find contradicting meanings. While friend James Farrell, reviewing his work, wrote "there is no questioning the authenticity of his work," foe Zora Neale Hurston found his dialect to be "tone-deaf . . . a puzzling thing" (Gates 5, 4). Authenticity, it appears, is in the ear of the reader. What's more, it is an inevitable aspect of criticism, a criterion that will inevitably be brought to bear on works that address the Race Question.

Wright's next novel, Native Son (1940), is considered his masterpiece, and is widely recognized as a central text of African-American literature. The protagonist, Bigger Thomas, was conceived by Wright, in his words, as a challenge to the Communists' "positive image" of African-Americans (qtd. Maxwell "Prole. as New Negro" 186). Reviewing the novel, Alain Locke asked: "What about Bigger? Is he typical, or as some hotly contest, misrepresentative? And whose 'native son' is he, anyway?" (Gates 19). Locke recognized the dialectic invoked by Bigger's story between type and "concrete individual" (19). He wrote: "In these arts [fiction and drama] characterization must be abstract enough to be typical, individual enough to be convincingly human" (19). The aesthetic challenge of balancing Bigger's character was
exacerbated by the fact that Wright was writing, in part, for a white majority whose
generalizations were different from his own.4

Like Wright's earlier work, Native Son proceeds with a realist plot--based on the
actual case of Robert Nixon--that some readers have mistakenly equated with an
outmoded naturalism, as though Bigger were little more than a black reincarnation of
Clyde Griffiths, Theodore Dreiser's murderous protagonist from An American Tragedy.
Naturalism is, however, only one narrative code of several at work in the text. As many
critics have noticed, Bigger possesses a Lukácsian typicality, embodying the effects of
economic oppression through class- and race-based domination. In "How Bigger Was
Born" Wright describes how his experience in Chicago taught him "that Bigger Thomas
was not black all the time; he was white, too, and there were literally millions of him,
everywhere"(Native Son xiv). He is an anonymous figure, undistinguished by heroic
virtues or even adequate intelligence. Wright does not explore the inner contours of
Bigger's consciousness; his inner self is characterized by paranoia, reaction, and
miscalculation. In short, Bigger has no identity.

Upon publication, Native Son was immediately recognized as a masterpiece of
ideological fiction. In his New Masses column "Change the World" Mike Gold hailed it,
along with Steinbeck's The Grapes of Wrath, as a culmination of the proletarian literature
movement. The degree to which Wright was able to create a dual consciousness narrative
that simultaneously signified as both a quintessentially American novel, telling the story
of an individual's tragic fall, and a paradigmatic work of proletarian fiction, attests to the
degree to which Wright achieves what Waldo Frank called the "dialectic of the artist" in
his speech at the 1935 American Writers' Congress, as discussed in Chapter One. Frank

4 see Washington 66.
theorized that life was experienced as a dialectic of self-as-object and self-as-subject, and claimed that art was valuable insofar as it explored the world as a product of consciousness and provided a superior alternative to the "shallow, static rationalism" that characterized American ideology (Hart 77).

The primary influence on Bigger's perspective is mass culture. The only sense of community that Bigger might have experienced, as Jake Jackson and Big Boy did, within conversational quartets of black men, is rendered impossible because, as Wright explains in "How Bigger Was Born," Bigger is fundamentally "estranged from the religion and folk culture of his race"(xiii). Gone are the citations of vernacular culture, references to spiritual song lyrics, and urban legends that characterized Wright's earlier works, and in their absence mass culture becomes the source of Bigger's larger understanding of the world. In "Celebrity as Identity: Native Son and Mass Culture," Ross Pudaloff convincingly argues that "Every critical episode in Native Son, from the initial scene in which Bigger confronts the rat to his capture and execution, is framed, perceived, and mirrored in and through the images provided by mass culture"(156). From the cartoonishly wealthy Daltons to Bigger's own conception of himself as a masterful villain, the plot develops along cinematic expectations that are pre-scripted by mass cultural forms. Unlike the ambiguously motivated, psychologically complex murders committed by Irene Redfield and Clyde Griffiths, Bigger's murder of Mary reflects no inner motivations, no premeditated foul play. During the crucial moment of the murder, as Bigger is alone with Mary in her room, he describes how he felt "as if he were acting upon a stage in front of a crowd of people"(83).
Authenticity plays no role in Bigger's characterization. It is represented in the mass culture of the novel, in the sensationalistic news stories and the movie posters that Bigger observes, but it appears as an object of satire, not as a determinant of identity. As cited earlier, Wright's intention with *Native Son* was to challenge the CPUSA's optimistic conception of the black proletariat. Wright's suspicion of notions of racial authenticity reflect his own relationship with the Communist Party in Chicago. In 1935, the party created the role of black literary spokesman for Wright, and his regularly published articles in the *New Masses* reported on black cultural topics, leading some critics to challenge Wright's authenticity as a representative Negro. The assumptions underlying this role, bestowed on Wright by virtue of his Marxist perspective and his black identity, would later factor into Wright's disillusionment when the Communists refused to support the South Side black organizer Ross, a real life version of who they mistook Wright to be: "a black political radical rooted in black ethnic culture" (Washington 145).

The absence of vernacular culture in *Native Son* needs to be contextualized alongside his two earlier novels. Wright was not categorically opposed or oblivious to the revolutionary potential of the vernacular black tradition. For the purposes of *Native Son* however, with its Dostoyevskian focus on the legal-judicial mechanisms of crime and punishment, these aspects of black identity are largely irrelevant. While Wright's earlier works were able to co-opt and reinscribe the cheerful mistrel signifiers of Dixie culture, juxtaposing them against the shocking and violent realities of southern life, the larger vision of *Native Son* dramatizes the more sobering reality that notions of racial authenticity and a useful vernacular tradition have long been enclosed and disarmed by modernity.
In the hands of critics, the notion of authenticity has been relativized and turned into another means of asserting ideological authority to speak. And yet a continuum of black-identified cultural production has continued through the century. Ralph Ellison, Wright's one-time friend, would produce *Invisible Man*, a novel that would take up the trope of the anonymous black protagonist and expose him to symbolic riffs that reinvent and reinscribe symbols from the history of slavery to the Thirties struggles between class- and race-based organized resistance. Ellison's prose, and, even more radically, Ishmael Reed's, are able to make use of the vernacular tradition insofar as they depart from realism in their postmodern narratives.
Conclusion
The Power of Negative Thinking

Those masterful images because complete
Grew in pure mind but out of what began?
A mound of refuse or the sweepings of a street,
Old kettles, old bottles, and a broken can,
Old iron, old bones, old rags, that raving slut
Who keeps the till. Now that my ladder's gone
I must lie down where all the ladders start
In the foul rag and bone shop of the heart.

W.B. Yeats

Buttons, string, bits of leather, a great deal of
soiled paper, a few shouts, a way of clasping the
hands, of going up steps, of smoothing a lapel,
some prejudices, a reoccurring dream, a distaste
for bananas, a few key words repeated endlessly.
With time . . . memories pile up, hindering action,
covering everything, making everything second-
hand, rubbed, frayed, soiled. The gestures and the
prejudices, the dislikes, all become one and that
one not itself but once removed, a dull echo.

Nathanael West

This dissertation has focused on the continuities between the literary production
of Thirties leftists and other cultural movements within modernity, and has challenged
theories of modernism that marginalize works of literary leftism. The emphasis these
chapters have maintained on similarities between genres redresses the ghetto-fication that
proletarian fiction has experienced, excluded from the traditional canons of modernism.
The presence of Hegelian thought in narratives of literary leftism attest to the degree that
these works grappled with many of the epistemological and ontological issues that also
distinguished the works of the major figures of early twentieth century modernism. T.S.
Eliot's poetry sought alternatives to modern consciousness in antiquity, seeking collective
models of subjectivity to replace the individualized, privatized experience of twentieth-
century life. James Joyce found connections between a day in the life of an Irish Jew in
Dublin at the turn of the century and Odysseus, the Homeric hero of antiquity. The paleomodernist use of history to critique the present as a debased, fallen state parallels the literary left's use of ideology to frame identity. Just as paleomodernism always existed in a dialectic with the neomodernism of William Carlos Williams, Virginia Woolf, Gertrude Stein, the Dada movement, and surrealism, so too did structures of identity within the literary culture influence literary leftists and challenge their ideological diagnoses of modernity.

The dialectic of ideology and identity was part of the modernist attempt to understand the self in a framework of subjective and objective discursive modes which, they hoped, might reveal possibilities for human freedom within modernity. Instead of turning to theology, however, as T.S. Eliot and D.H. Lawrence did during the Thirties, literary leftists articulated their critique of modernity on the grounds of the telos of history. The Hegelianism of the literary leftists of the Thirties does not render their cultural project obsolete. Despite the fact that, for some, a Hegelian view of historical teleology accommodated a faithful, blinkered loyalty to Stalin, even after his infamous purges had begun, for others it was a productive tension that engaged and critiqued the antistatism, egalitarianism, individualism, populism, and laissez-faire economism that characterized the American ideology of the Depression.¹

Just as leftist fiction from the Thirties has more in common with its contemporary cultural movements than has been acknowledged, it also contains more inner diversity, in terms of topic, philosophical outlook, and narrative strategies, than the facile category of "proletarian fiction" suggests. The novels produced during the Thirties criticized

¹ Lipset and Marks It Didn't Happen Here. 30.
American culture as both ideology and hegemony. Caren Irr describes the "ongoing dialectical relations between formula and revision" that informed the Thirties leftist novel (119). This dialectic is apparent in the myriad formulations of the ratio between self and world. The works of Robert Cantwell, Agnes Smedley, John Steinbeck, Nathanael West, and Richard Wright reflect an ongoing intertextual dialogue on the nature of the self.

Robert Cantwell distributes subjectivity across a range of character perspectives, locating the self in what Charles Taylor calls the "network identities" of small town life, threatened by the rationalizing, dehumanizing forces of factory production. In The Land of Plenty, ideology is symbolized by the roaring din of industrial production, and it appears more directly in the mathematical formulas and utilitarian concerns articulated by the capitalist bosses. Class consciousness materializes in conversations during power outings, strikes, and other respites from work, but beneath dialogue that often strains with slangy references and a contrived irony, images of sound and light become conceits that juxtapose the flimsiness of orally-formed speech communities against the hard and fast determinants of the mode of production.

Agnes Smedley's self-fictionalization leads her to understand her life as a progression from subjective obscurity to an objective state of retrospection. Her excavation of childhood scenes of interpellation locate the sources of her later radicalism within her formative self-identification within the family, but she co-opts structures of sexual relations and family roles to redefine herself post-nationally. By treating gender as a metaphor, she is able to apply it like a familiarizing template to the intimidating cosmopolitan society she confronts in adulthood. The uncanny figures that emerge in her
recollected of her ascent through knowledge--mysterious intellectuals and eroticized teachers--are compacted manifestations of the intertwined discourses of Freudianism and a Marxist sociology of knowledge. *Daughter of Earth* describes a complex model of subjectivity that dissolves distinctions between ideology and identity by showing, on the one hand, how aspects of subjective identity can be used for progressive purposes, and on the other, how ideology and all objectivist discourses are founded in psychological structures that defy rational systemization. The final enclosing of her sense of self within a mystical communion with the Arizona desert attests to the degree that Smedley understood her life not as a cultural progression but a fulfillment of her frontier-engendered destiny.

John Steinbeck's California labor trilogy engage central ideological points of the left in their realistic evocations of CPUSA organizing, forced migration due to capitalist crisis, and the potential of organic uprisings against oppression by workers. Steinbeck's works resolve the contradictions between ideology--present in his works as the "factual" settings he based on extensive research--and identity--which in Steinbeck's novels becomes a "black box" by which to explain the views of characters. The battle in *In Dubious Battle* is dubious because, Steinbeck suggests, the communists who lead the strike consider themselves to be above personal concerns, when in fact they are wholly controlled by them. In *The Grapes of Wrath*, Steinbeck once again absorbs ideology into identity, as is especially apparent in the novel's closing image of Rose of Sharon suckling a starving stranger to her breast. The strangeness of this secularized mother and (adult) child posits a radical redefinition of family as a means of revolutionary identification, but the radical implications of Steinbeck's evocation of the Joads have been absorbed into a
conservative means of reading and teaching the novel that evokes John Ford's aesthetic more than Steinbeck's.

Nathanael West's novels attempt to preclude the co-optive processes to which Steinbeck's work fell prey by abolishing discourses of identity. In *The Day of the Locust* and *Miss Lonelyhearts*, West critiques the mass culture of print journalism and the Hollywood studio system, seeing them as sources of a standardization that threatens to absorb the affective idiosyncrasies and that constitute human subjectivity. In *A Cool Million* West rejoins his critique of mass culture with a critique of the classic liberal formulation of the nation-state citizen. Nathanael West's novels strip identity of any notion of authenticity and deconstruct all aspects of subjectivity as commodified performances culled from mass culture.

Richard Wright's Thirties fiction evokes subjectivity as a contested terrain being overtaken by mass culture but resisting through a vernacular culture of language communities. In *Lawd Today!* and *Uncle Tom's Children*, ideology appears in Wright's work at the symbolic level, informing the double-voiced meanings of the vernacular artifacts he cites. *Native Son* evokes black subjectivity with a pointed negativity, as an absent space to be inscribed by socio-political discourses of control. Wright clears away the earlier sources of potential freedom as so many diversionary aspects of the cultural superstructure. The song lyrics, urban legends, and oral communities of everyday life will not alter Bigger Thomas's encounter with the legal system, which processes him with a unanimity that perpetuates the systemically racist practice of capital punishment under the façade of due process and objectivity.
All of these authors were, in a sense, waging an old battle that had already been lost. The institutions of mass culture were already irrevocably in place by the Thirties, and the work ethic of Protestant heritage had been replaced, during the twenties, by a lifestyle ethic of consumerism and leisure, rendering irrelevant Marx's claim that production was the central human activity. An Enlightenment trust in rational critique led Thirties leftists to the novel, which appealed to them as an instance of Habermasian communicative rationality, and they applied its conventions with a faith in the transparency of realism that was checked by their Marxist theories of ideology.

The works of literary leftism this dissertation has studied re-enact the larger etymological trajectory of the concept of ideology during its two-century existence. The Enlightenment definition of ideology as false consciousness is apparent in Cantwell's *The Land of Plenty*, and other proletarian novels that center around the epiphany of the worker, who, after witnessing a violent repression of direct action, sheds his or her ideology and realizes the truthfulness of the Marxist perspective. In Steinbeck's novels, objectivist delusions mislead characters, as when Jim, the organizer in *In Dubious Battle*, mistakes his repressed homosexual desire for his fellow-organizer Mac to be revolutionary passion. The works of West, Smedley, and Wright depart from the "false consciousness" paradigm and depict ideology as dominant ideas effacing their own mediation. This view corroborates the formulation of ideology by Marx and Engels in *The German Ideology*, which specifies ideological discourses as universalizing ones. From West's debunking of journalistic objectivity to Wright's critique of the legal system and of objectivist discourse in general, the works of these authors emphasize the social origins of ruling discourses.
The ideological critique of the Thirties left faded into history as critics and philosophers realized the impossibility of separating reality from ideology. Noticing a "For-itself of ideology at work in the very In-itself of extra-ideological activity," Slavoj Žižek, in "The Spectre of Ideology," explains that ideology has been abandoned by progressives because "this notion somehow grows 'too strong'; it begins to embrace everything, inclusive of the very neutral, extra-ideological ground supposed to provide the standard by means of which one can measure ideological distortion" (69). More recent theorizations shift from ideology to hegemony, a move that entails the abandoning of the project of searching for oppressive structures in either the explicit discourses (Marx) or the institutional practices of society (Althusser), and instead examine the spontaneous instantiations of control that are present in the act of experiencing the world not as ideology but as reality.

The cultural world of the Thirties no longer exists. The legacy of the paleomodernist school subsided into history. Their attempts to critique the present using connections to classicism and antiquity had proven too difficult and recondite to make the widespread impact their authors had hoped for. Near the end of his career, in 1939, W.B. Yeats distances himself from his earlier symbolism and arrives, in his old age, "where all the ladders start / In the foul rag and bone shop of the heart" ("The Circus Animals Desertion" 199). The culture that was produced after the second World War reflects a reluctance to view history with the Nietzschean perspectivalism that characterized the literature of high modernism. In the wake of Auschwitz, the well-stocked libraries of Nazi officers attested to paleomodernism's adaptability to fascism.
The aspects of ideological critique that challenged identitarian discourses during the Thirties subsided after the war, and in the wake of European fascism, American fiction defied political models that formulated human behavior as conditionable by social or deterministic forces. The focus on self-identity returned, and in the regional grotesques of Flannery O'Connor, the generational horror of William Faulkner, and the escapist simplicity sought by the veteran heroes of Ernest Hemingway, the centrality of the experiential self is apparent in the classic American fiction of the forties.

It appears that the identitarian aspects of American literature have won the day. Literature has important value for what it can teach us about difference, and the institutionalization of multiculturalism in humanities curricula during the nineties attests to the degree that the most important symbolic function of present-day American literature is to include subjectivities that might otherwise go unnoticed. But this predominance of self and identity in American fiction does not indicate an implicit narrowness or limitation of the American novel. As a form, the novel is pliable and adaptive, capable of accommodating diverse perspectives through both representation and discursive imitation, redressing the facile simplifications of instrumental reason and empirical-rationalist worldviews with a higher, more encompassing description of human experience.

In 1939, around the same time that Yeats was lying down in the rubble of neomodernism, Nathanael West described a similar list of detritus in his unpublished short story "The Adventurer." Both Yeats, knowingly at the end of his career, and West, unknowingly near the end of his, position themselves among a litter whose specificity represents the realist tradition. But while Yeats welcomes a straightforward realism after
a career as a poet during which "Players and painted stage took all my love / And not those things that they were emblems of" (199). West cannot maintain a vision of the objects in their specificity. West's description foregrounds the difficulty of perception. Encrusted with the habitual rituals of everyday life, objects lose their materiality, inscribed with the reiterations of language until they can no longer be seen unadorned. In the world of mass-produced objects, subjects too become commodities, their prejudices and dislikes as interchangeable as their possessions.

The prospects for an organized political left in America subsided after the Thirties. Socialist membership peaked during the early Thirties, and Communist Party membership peaked at the end of the decade. Significant third-party movements in Minnesota, New York, and Wisconsin were defeated by Roosevelt's co-optive tactics. City-level political inroads were made by Communist candidates such as Ben Davis, whose election to the New York City Council in 1943 led to electoral reform that made it nearly impossible to successfully run for office outside of the two party system. Direct action in the form of sit-down strikes was deployed in the early forties after being temporarily halted during the war. The final nail in the labor movement coffin came with the Taft-Hartley bill of 1947, which significantly curtailed unions' ability to strike.

The Thirties was the high point in the history of the American left, at least in terms of the number of people who were convinced to become involved, either officially or as fellow travelers, with the organized efforts of the communists and the socialists. The rise in union power that followed in later decades followed a syndicalist trajectory whose conservative culture broke definitively from the intellectual leftists with which they temporarily merged during the mid-Thirties. The proletarian cultural movement waned
during the forties, with many prominent leftists abandoning the party and denouncing their earlier affiliations with it.

The historic paths of scientific and critical Marxism have diverged, and while the former is virtually extinct in the United States, the latter has persevered, and is perpetuated through a literary-critical continuum sustained in the textual dialogues facilitated by university humanities departments. The decisive flaw in ideological critique was the inability of ideologists to turn their debunking sociology back on themselves. By refusing to acknowledge their own interest in the debates over social causality, they were also unable to see that their discourse of class liberation also functioned to bestow them with a cultural authority to speak.

In the second volume of *The Dark Side of the Dialectic, The Future of Intellectuals and the Rise of the New Class*, Alvin Gouldner identifies a new technological-bureaucratic class that grows immensely between 1870-1930, constituted by the engineers, managers, accountants, college faculty, government administrators, and media producers that constitute the requisite workforce of the modern nation-state. This class is distinguished by its truncation of the traditional extended family into the nuclear model, its mastery of instrumental knowledge, its secularism, and its culture of discourse. The development of printing technology allows intellectuals to circulate knowledge and develop a semi-autonomy from market demands. Gouldner writes: "Definitions of social reality made by local elites may now be invidiously contrasted (by intellectuals) with definitions made in other places and times"(4). Despite the fact that it is elitist and self-seeking, as well as "internally divided with tensions between (technical) intelligentsia and
(humanistic) intellectuals," this flawed, universal class, as Gouldner describes it, "may also be the best card that history has presently given us to play"(8, 7).

The connection between Thirties literary leftists and present-day humanities academics derives from their shared membership in the new class. The rationalism of their social critiques epitomizes the culture of critical discourse, based on evidence and argumentation, that universities teach. The tradition of critical Marxism survives in university humanities departments, protected from the demands of a market economy by the socialized cost of higher education. Gouldner writes:

Marx and Marxism are creations of a library-haunting, book-store-browsing, museum-loving--and hence leisure-possessing--academic intelligentsia. They are unthinkable without the entire panoply of libraries, bookstores, journals, newspapers, publishing houses, even party schools, whose cadre and culture constitute a dense infra-structure at whose center there is the Western university. (Gouldner 57)

Gouldner defends the culture of critical discourse, in which he participates, for its ability to resist the industrializing and imperialist aspects of capitalism, and claims that this class supports socialism because that form of government--rational and bureaucratic--values their cultural capital. On this point, he seems to have been mistaken. Writing during the seventies, and examining global patterns, Gouldner thought the new class's ascension might lead to a political turn toward socialism. Instead, the United States has moved to the right, and seen the proliferation of the technical intelligentsia and the decline of power of humanities intellectuals. The privatization and, more recently, consolidation, of the communications infrastructure, and the deep corporate ties of universities, threaten the semi-autonomy required for rational social critique.
Nonetheless, the textual encounter that university literature courses facilitate reproduces the productive tension of ideology and identity, culling and honing objective theories from narratives of subjective experience. Unlike the ideologists of the past, who critiqued competing discourses on the grounds of their vested interests while maintaining their own disinterestedness, contemporary leftist humanities intellectuals focus on the imminent self-deconstructing patterns that reside within language and representation. This signals a shift from theorizing language not as mimetic of reality but rather constitutive of it. From Wittgenstein's language games and Gadamer's claim that "Everything that is, is language," to the Lacanian adage that the unconscious is structured like a language, and the semiotician's attention to the textuality of all human experience, the linguistic turn in twentieth-century philosophy is apparent everywhere.

Within the context of the textual encounter--the experience of reading and interpreting literature--the relevance of Hegelian philosophy is once again apparent. Hegel's philosophy of history posits the existence of the Geist, a collective, master-subject that embodies all human beings, growing in rationality and freedom as it moves through time. Neither the teleology nor the idealism of Hegel's theory of history lessen the evocative, metaphorical power of his description of the development of human consciousness. Hegel inherited his ontology of subject and object from Kant, who had performed a Copernican revolution in epistemology when he pointed out that instead of attempting to explain the patterns of human understanding according to an external world of objects we should understand these patterns as manifestations of a structured human consciousness, a series of inner schemata within which all noumena was pre-sorted. Hegel develops his theory of Geist based on Kant's model of consciousness, significantly
altering it by removing the *ding an sich*, the thing-in-itself, to theorize human consciousness as, in essence, an ongoing dialogue with itself.

Marx's inversion of Hegelian *Geist*, reconceiving it as a reflection of the mode of production rather than an innate structure of consciousness, was more an adjustment than a dispersal of Hegelian phenomenology. Marx's relocation of human consciousness within the cultural superstructure, as a reflection of the economic mode of production that constitutes the base of society, in no way alters the insights of Hegel's inquiries into the limits of knowledge. The Kantian model of consciousness on which he founded his theory of *Geist* structures the phenomenal world in terms of subjects and objects, an ontology that reflects the subject and preposition structure of language. Hegel realized that our attempts to apply our categories of reason to the noumenal *ding an sich* by way of the transcendental aesthetic were bound to lead to totalizing misperceptions in which we confuse our view of the world for the world itself. What is needed to keep this totalizing tendency in check, as Žižek points out in *Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel, and the Critique of Ideology*, is a sense of the contingency that exists in the for-itself of the subject, a freedom that contrasts and contradicts the necessity and determinism of objects. Hegel does not, Žižek emphasizes, call for a synthesizing *aufhebung* of this dialectic. Rather, we should "tarry with the negative" (*Reader* 225).

Existence is not structured like a language, and on that point we are post-Kantian; however, human understanding may be. Žižek connects German Idealism with the post-Freudian psychoanalysis of Jacques Lacan, defining ideology as the attaching of a signifier to the Lacanian topography of the Real (the accumulated failed attempts of the mind to understand reality). The act of naming is metaphorized as a *point de capiton*, the
semiotic quilting point which attaches meaning to objects. Elizabeth Wright writes: "This empty presupposition that marks the act of naming is what Lacan has identified as precipitating the signifier's 'fall' into the signified" (Žižek Reader 226). The Lacanian view that this act of naming does not explore exteriority so much as construct it, in a continuous process of becoming, returns us to the schemata of the Idealists, which, in Hegel's use, described consciousness as a constant process of movement from necessity to freedom.

Žižek convincingly argues for both the mutual inextractability of ideology and identity, as well as for the ongoing relevance of Hegel's philosophy of history. The movement he describes, from the bounded subjectivity experienced when one is objectified by external forces, to the sense of mastery and freedom that comes through the synthesis, by the imagination, of reality and thought, evokes the function, at least in ideal terms, of the humanities college curriculum in the nation-state. University literature courses emphasize the missing pieces of a national, self-representing culture, pointing out the unconsidered subjectivities in an ever expanding canon of relevant records of the past. Despite the fact that the project of recognizing and understanding the subjectivities that our culture has traditionally alienated and Othered can (and has been) co-opted and turned into a mere rhetoric of diversity, the ideal of this project remains crucial.

The negative does not exist in nature. Negation and contradiction are distinguishing qualities of human reason. In a post-ideological age, when we can no longer appeal to an uninterested perspective from which to critique the massively-complicated messages of mass culture, the power of negative thought provides a strong argument for the continued relevance of the humanities. Despite the fact that
unprecedented irony and cynicism make the sort of belief implied by ideology a remnant from the past, and in the face of an anodyne, affirmative culture that traces from Dale Carnegie's 1936 self-help classic *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, to the latest pop psychology of Tony Robbins, the self-reflexivity and rationality of the practice of literary study offers a dissenting negative knowledge to check the positive, self-affirming national hegemony. This practice need not necessarily be called Marxist; Marx himself famously insisted, late in his career, that he was no Marxist. But insofar as it maintains a dissenting voice from a national identity that hides its essential antagonism behind an illusory unity, it performs a function analogous to ideological critique at its best.
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