

Spring 1976

# CONCERN AND CRAFT: THE "PARTISAN REVIEW" AND THE 1930S

FRED BLAINE METTING

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METTING, Fred Blaine, 1946-  
CONCERN AND CRAFT: THE PARTISAN  
REVIEW AND THE 1930s.

University of New Hampshire, Ph.D., 1976  
Literature, American

**Xerox University Microfilms,** Ann Arbor, Michigan 48106

CONCERN AND CRAFT: THE PARTISAN  
REVIEW AND THE 1930s

by

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B.S., Ohio University, 1968  
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A THESIS

Submitted to the University of New Hampshire  
In Partial Fulfillment of  
The Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy  
Graduate School  
Department of English  
May, 1976



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## ABSTRACT

### CONCERN AND CRAFT: THE PARTISAN REVIEW AND THE 1930s

by

FRED METTING

The decade of the 1930s brought forth notable achievements in American literature including vivid realism in the novel, documentary strength in journalism, and exciting collective experimentation in the theatre. Despite this vitality, literary work of the decade has often been misunderstood or neglected. This study is intended as a corrective to that misunderstanding and neglect.

Specifically, this is a study of the American literary journal Partisan Review, from its inception, in 1934, to 1940. This study emphasizes the dual nature of the critical concerns and fictional offerings of the journal. The Partisan Review stressed both radical social concern and artistic craft. In its criticism it sought to establish and promote a literature revolutionary in content but free of formula and cliché. This promotion was accomplished by stressing variety, style, tradition, and experimentation. In its fiction columns the Partisan Review offered a forum

for artists intent on exploring social realities with independence and freedom. This forum attracted artists with considerable skill; John Dos Passos, James T. Farrell, and James Agee were among those writers who contributed memorable fiction to the Partisan Review of the 1930s.

The Partisan Review epitomizes a pattern of thought that was widely accepted among depression intellectuals. This dual emphasis on concern and craft provides a touchstone which can be used to evaluate and appreciate a great deal of the decade's work. Of course there was excess and abuse; the New Masses and the sectarianism of this journal serves as a foil to the much less rigid Partisan Review. But, on the whole, this study illustrates that the intellectuals of the decade moved left in the political spectrum while maintaining their artistic integrity.

This study, then, documents this radical political outlook and artistic integrity in the Partisan Review. Hopefully, an appreciative understanding of this key journal will lead to further interest in the literary achievements of this vital decade.

## INTRODUCTION

I am glad that the literature of the thirties is being re-examined....The great danger of the decade was political dogmatism, to which many lesser writers succumbed but to which the great writers rose above. Its great virtue was strength of feeling, which in literature, is not negligible.

Granville Hicks

A closer look at the magazines and newspapers of the thirties, as well as the fiction and reportage, strengthens the notion that the writing is too diverse and reflective of too many points of view to lend itself to easy formulations.

Daniel Aaron

To a considerable degree, the mind of twentieth-century America is best revealed in the nation's magazines, for these supply the most immediate record of the debates and tensions that have swept the intellectual community. This was particularly true in the 1930s, where many of the books and novels published during the decade appeared first as journal articles. More important, the magazines provided a forum for collective experimentation, dialogue, and criticism at a time when events often threatened to overwhelm the solitary writer. Thus the journals became a crucial channel through which intellectuals could raise issues, test ideas, refine their arguments, and comment directly on the problems of the day.

Richard Pells

Looking back on the 1930s three decades later, community organizer Saul Alinsky remarked that that time "may have been our most creative period. It was a decade of involvement. It's a cold world now. It was a hot world then."<sup>1</sup> In my study of American literature I have been drawn to the fiction of the 1930s because of this "heat," this creative engagement characteristic of the literature of that decade. I find this literature to be pragmatic; it is the author's response to social and economic problems. Yet this literature is honest and flexible enough to preserve artistic integrity and variety.

However, my appetite for this artful social fiction was rarely satisfied within my formal academic study. The literature of the 1930s was often neglected entirely or dismissed as political propaganda. As I disregarded the taboos and studied this era on my own, I found that other students of the literature of the depression voiced a similar dissatisfaction with our understanding of that period. There was a general agreement that the many years of formalist critical bias and anti-communist ideology had resulted in distortion of the literary achievements of the depression generation. Many of these students of the 1930s have called for a re-evaluation of that decade's literature.<sup>2</sup>

My attraction to the literature of the 1930s and dissatisfaction with the academic neglect of that era led to this work, a study of the American literary journal

Partisan Review, from its inception, in 1934, to 1940. I believe that the criticism and fiction of the Partisan Review epitomize the strengths and virtues of the decade's best work. This journal provided a forum for intellectuals and artists who sought to explore the economic and social realities of the depression with the free creative imagination. The journal proclaimed a radical social vision; yet its independence lifted its art from dogma and cliché.

I regard this study as important for several reasons. First, the fiction and criticism of the Partisan Review can stand alone as examples of the vigorous art of an important, long-lived, and influential journal. Second, this journal can serve as a key to the most important works and movements of the decade, for the Partisan Review drew to its pages John Dos Passos, James T. Farrell, James Agee, and many other artists who desired to create a relevant yet independent art. As its editors said, the journal "lived the life of its times." Third, a study of this journal can correct misconceptions of the decade, which many view as a time when naive naturalism and dogma masqueraded as art. On the contrary, there is a body of depression literature, and the fiction of the Partisan Review stands as a chief example of this work, which ranks with the best American literature of any decade. This literature engages itself with our social problems without neglecting aesthetic demands. It is this integration of purpose and craft that I document in this study.

My opening chapter explores the earlier radical intellectual community in the Greenwich Village Bohemia. This early American literary socialism was a varied mixture of avant-garde art and all-inclusive radical politics. This is the era of John Reed, Mabel Dodge's salon, the Patterson Strike Pageant, the Armory Art Show, and the Masses magazine. In general, the Masses magazine was characterized by a joyous spirit and catholic tastes. However, occasional disagreements over the artist's relationship to political dogma foreshadowed the major literary battles of the depression.

The economic crisis and social displacement that depression writers experienced and brought to their art is discussed in chapter two. Here I survey the careers of Malcolm Cowley, Alfred Kazin, Edmund Wilson, Sherwood Anderson, and Harold Clurman to show that as many intellectuals moved leftward in the political spectrum in response to the depression they maintained their freedom and integrity. Thus the Partisan Review was not an isolated phenomenon, but rather an index to a significant pattern of thought among depression intellectuals.

Because of the extremity of the social crisis there was a corresponding danger of aesthetic extremism. This rigid and dogmatic approach to art found voice in the New Masses magazine. Here art and criticism became weapons in class warfare. In chapter three I study the sectarianism of the New Masses; this study serves as a foil to the



discussion of the Partisan Review. The Partisan Review is discussed in chapters four and five, with emphasis on the radical political outlook and high artistic standards in both its critical concerns and fictional offerings.

This study of the Partisan Review, then, is a step in the necessary re-evaluation of the literature of the 1930s. The Partisan Review was a center for writers unafraid to examine the reality and implications of economic collapse, yet determined to practice their artistic craft. This dual emphasis produced an exciting literature, rewarding in both its art and humanity.

## CHAPTER I: PRE-DEPRESSION LITERARY RADICALISM

There was plenty of romantic rapture in my revolution. It looked more like hurrah than hypothesis a good deal of the time.

Max Eastman

The second decade of the twentieth century was a period in which there was zealous social work, backed by optimistic social theory; humanitarian crusades abounded, gracious amateur movements made a mushroom growth. This activity was never ruthless or bitter, but earnest and idealistic.

Frederick J. Hoffman

There was no precedent in America for its fascinating melange of wit, learning, bold new crusading art and literature, sex enlightenment, reportage, socialism.

Mike Gold speaking on the Masses magazine

It stood for fun, truth, beauty, realism, freedom, peace, feminism, revolution. I hardly realized at the time the nature of the problem the Masses group was trying to solve--co-operation between artists, men of genius, egotists inevitably and rightfully, proud, sensitive...now it seems to me an extraordinary triumph that so much good-humored and effective co-operation was possible between them.

Floyd Dell on the Masses

The December 15, 1936 issue of New Masses purported to be an anniversary issue, celebrating twenty-five years of radical journalism by linking its publishing history with the original Masses magazine founded in 1911. But the two lead articles of this anniversary issue present a conflicting testimony of America's radical-intellectual history. Neither article celebrates a smooth, coherent radical tradition; both emphasize the telling differences between the innocent pre-war era and the experience of the depression generation.

Joseph Freeman's article is significantly entitled "Old Fervor and New Discipline." He praised the Masses magazine, pointing to its varied talents and its stirring effects. Freeman was impressed by the magazine's love poetry, cartoons laughing at the status quo, expositions of Freud's sex theories, and analyses of the new American literature then being fashioned by Dreiser, Anderson, and Sandburg. Freeman said that these various forces were clustered around a central idea, the idea that capitalism had monstrosly outlived its usefulness, that socialism alone could open new ways of life for America. Radicalism at that time was a mixed bag with revisionists, orthodox Marxists, middle-class liberals, muckrakers, syndicalists, and anarchists, and Freeman was quick to point out that "all these diverse moods, sentiments, and programs found expression in the pages of Masses," But the era of gay clothing, colored neckties, and pell-mell radicalism was doomed by passing events.

Freeman saw a definite change in radicalism after America's entrance into World War I. The Liberator, predecessor to Masses, was a much more serious publication tied not to a varied socialist movement but to the communist party. The New Masses followed the Liberator in 1926 and its early diversity was interrupted by the depression. Because of the seriousness of the economic crisis, Freeman said that the New Masses "had to make their position more clear than ever....This time historic conditions were different; the communist idea demanded more deliberate organization, more purposeful and coordinated action." In summary, Freeman pointed to a most telling difference that calls into question the legitimacy of the anniversary celebration:

The old Masses, product of a more peaceful era, was noted for its easy-going humor. The New Masses, product of the post-war period...is concerned primarily with the seriousness of the world-wide struggle. Fascism cannot be laughed out of existence; it must be fought.<sup>1</sup>

John Dos Passos contributed to this anniversary issue, and he too was quick to point to a wide generational gap in his article "Grandfather and Grandson." The elder Masses was the voice of the Village which "stood for bohemianism, yearning for the cafes and red lights and museums of Europe, orange candles, batiks, but also for a genuine community of feeling...and for the romantic libertarian creed." Dos Passos argued that the post-war spirit of defeat, sectarianism, and retraction made it impossible for the New Masses to inherit more than a single tendency

of the anarchic, democratic, bohemian Masses. The New Masses "has done a great deal to educate the country in Marxian thinking," Dos Passos said, "but I don't think it will turn out to have had anything like the fertilizing influence that the old Masses had." Dos Passos certainly threatened the anniversary celebration by calling for a renunciation of narrow sectarianism and a return to the genuine Masses tradition of twenty-five years before.<sup>2</sup>

This earlier innocent and joyous American socialism of the period before World War I provides an interesting starting point for our study, for it was a time when artistic experiment and political commitment seemingly merged with little controversy or difficulty. The scene of this mixing was the Village.<sup>3</sup> The various personalities and movements in this mixture seemed loosely but comfortably bound, not by a shared philosophy but by a common enemy. The Village stood for rebellion against the status quo; its enemies were drab clothing, squeamish moralistic art, rigid sexual mores, and the Saturday Evening Post. "The Bohemian hates order," Joseph Freeman commented, and this distrust of rigidity took on a kaleidoscopic pattern of gaiety, freedom, and various "isms." Drawn by cheap rents and an exciting air of experimentation, would-be rebels and artists from all over the country came to the village to discuss cubism and anarchism.

Malcolm Cowley was one of those drawn to this excitement. He said there was a feeling of revolution in

the air, but that the revolt that the Villagers dreamed of would "start with a dance through the streets and barrels of cider opened at every corner, and beside each barrel a back country ham fresh from the oven." Cowley viewed this Village in a large perspective as the latest incarnation of the eternal warfare of bohemian against bourgeois, poet against propriety. This Village was multifaceted; it was a mood, a feeling of liberty, a commitment to change. It was living for the moment, women smoking on the street, love affairs, paganism, black floors, and a desire for self-expression.

Cowley saw two kinds of revolt in the pre-war Village: the individual and the social, the aesthetical and the political, the bohemian and the radical. "In the prewar days," he remarked, "the two currents were hard to distinguish. Bohemians read Marx and all the radicals had a touch of the bohemian; it seemed that both types were fighting in the same cause. Socialism, free love, anarchism, syndicalism, free-verse--all these creeds were lumped together." Cowley remembered that during the bread riots of 1915 the Wobblies made their headquarters in Mary Vorse's studio on Tenth Street and Villagers might get their heads beaten in at a riot at Union Square before appearing at the Liberal Club to recite Swinburne. Many in an audience listening to a lecture on the latest movement in European avant garde art might be wearing bloody bandages.<sup>4</sup>

These various activities attracted a variety of personalities. "I have had occasion to meet most of these free spirits at one time or another," said Joseph Freeman, "no two of them were alike. The majority, it may be said, came to bohemia because it was a border country stretching between two worlds. It combined a post-graduate school, a playground and a clinic for those who had broken with an old culture."<sup>5</sup> Headquarters for these free spirits was the Fifth Avenue house of Mabel Dodge. Her salon was the gathering place for poets, socialists, free-lovers, suffragists, feminists, reformers, labor leaders, anarchists, cubists, Wobblies, trade-unionists, psychoanalysts, and all others engaged in frenzied experimentation and indecorous living. Here sensitive poets and artists would crowd together to hear the rough, tough one-eyed Big Bill Haywood speak on bloody labor battles in the far West. Mabel Dodge saw to it that barriers went down and people reached each other who had not touched before.

Here one could also meet John Reed, a seminal figure of this early radicalism once described as "a combination of Jack London, Peck's Bad Boy, Don Giovanni, Don Quixote, and the Playboy of the Western World."<sup>6</sup> Reed, the typical Villager, combined many impulses. This former Harvard cheerleader organized the giant pageant in Madison Square Garden in support of striking silk workers in Patterson, New Jersey. The pageant featured over two thousand workers in songs and skits, an exciting mingling of union

organizing and theatre. Reed was interested in both cubism and the Wobbly movement. Reed gave up a very active interest in poetry to ride with Poncho Villa and report on the Mexican Revolution. Later Reed detailed the exciting events of the Russian Revolution and was buried in the Kremlin Wall. Reed said of himself:

Some men seem to get their direction early, to grow naturally and with little change to the thing they are to be. I have no idea what I shall be or do one month from now. Whenever I have tried to become some one thing, I have failed; it is only by drifting with the wind that I have found myself, and plunged joyously into a new role.<sup>7</sup>

This happy fluctuation, typical of the Village and its pre-war radicalism, found a voice in Floyd Dell. In the preface to his book Homecoming: An Autobiography, Dell recognized that his story was important, for it is the story of many others involved in the Village. Throughout the book he dwells on his fascination with the magic of words, their power and their poetry: "If one speaks the right words in the right order, one can have power over Nature--that is magic. But the words must be the only worlds possible." This intense interest in poetry was combined with a commitment to socialism. His early attempts to reconcile poetry and revolution were futile. The poetic part of his nature would not accept the effort to be a workingman; Dell was forced to cut himself in two in order to be both a poetic craftsman of the words and a radical worker. A sampling of his poetry at this time reveals this divided self; Dell was writing both elevated



love sonnets and stark poems praising toilers. The early part of Dell's autobiography is a detailed account of the difficulties of being an "intellectual proletarian."<sup>8</sup>

Dell's failure to write socialist poetry, his division of his life into several selves--socialist, poet, reporter, editor, lover--was overcome in the atmosphere of the Village. Dell refused to write the kind of fiction tied directly to immediate socialist philosophy, so a bohemian existence in the Village was his answer: "As a Bohemian, I did not ask of myself any regular, practical propaganda duties; my contribution to the Revolution would be such truth-telling as I could manage to do. And so I regained my self-respect as an artist."<sup>9</sup> The freedom and diversity of bohemia, its mixture of art and politics, was the setting that allowed Dell to integrate general socialist principles and a poetic disposition. It was in the Village that Dell found peace and tolerance and a chance at self-discovery. It was here that Dell found the freedom to practice his "intellectual vagabondage," to seek new lovers, explore psychoanalysis, read Ibsen and Whitman, and be an anarchist at play.

Dell arrived in the Village in the Fall of 1913 and found the art and dreams and women to his liking. The Village for Dell was an escape from convention, an audience for his experiments in verse, and a setting for many love affairs. Dell spent many hours in the Village dreaming of both the ideal society and the ideal woman. Here in

the Village Dell did see destructive escape through drink and many conflicts and schisms, but no one in the Village took themselves too seriously; above all, the Village "enjoyed laughing at its own convictions."<sup>10</sup>

These multiple convictions and this enjoyable laughter formed the basis for the Masses magazine. The Masses had, of course, been preceded by decades of growing socialist agitation and realistic-naturalistic fiction attempting to deal with rising industrialism, strikes, and agrarian unrest.<sup>11</sup> But, at the beginning of the twentieth century the broadly humanitarian socialist movement seemed comfortably eclectic in its attitude toward art and dogma. It looked toward a vague utopian future while it absorbed the art of Ibsen, Whitman, Shelly, Morris and Jack London. Examples of this variety can be found in Wilshire's Magazine (founded in 1901) which published the poetry of Keats along with the newer American realism. The early interest of the International Socialist Review was on the craft oriented philosophy of William Morris, far from the industrial emphasis in later communism. Upton Sinclair's anthology The Cry For Justice: An Anthology of the Literature of Social Protest (Philadelphia, 1915) exemplified this diversity by including selections from Blake, Cervantes, Emerson, Swift, Shaw, and Hugo.<sup>12</sup> There was, at this early time, no conflict between art and social message.

The Masses most immediate and significant precursor was The Comrade, which began in New York in 1901. The

Comrade's statement of purpose pointed to its effort "to mirror Socialist thought as it finds expression in art and literature. Its function will be to develop the aesthetic impulse in the Socialist movement, to utilize the talent we already have, and to quicken into being aspirations that are latent."<sup>13</sup> In this attempt to unite socialist thought and art The Comrade printed a wide range of material, including misty utopian visions and Pre-Raphaelite drawing.

The Comrade was a short lived venture, but it was followed by the magazine that now stands as the most memorable product of this pre-war socialist era, the Masses magazine. As Irving Howe points out, "there never has been, and probably never will be again, another radical magazine like the Masses, with its slapdash gathering of energy, youth, hope."<sup>14</sup> The Masses was founded by the socialist Piet Vlag in January, 1911. Vlag was a Dutch immigrant who ran a Village restaurant which was a gathering place for a wide spectrum of artists and socialists. Vlag himself envisioned a wide co-operative movement and his magazine was full of idealism and sentiment and crusade. In 1912 Max Eastman took over the magazine, and his editorial in December of 1912 proclaimed the anti-dogmatic spirit that was to guide the magazine until wartime pressures forced its closing:

We shall have no further part in the factional disputes within the Socialist Party; we are opposed to the dogmatic spirit which sustains these disputes. Our appeal will be to the masses, both Socialist and non-Socialist, with entertainment, education and the livelier kinds of propaganda.<sup>15</sup>

Looking back on its career, Eastman could say, "the Masses was not ill-humored and bitter, it was lusty and gay. I doubt if socialism was ever advocated in a more life-affirming spirit."<sup>16</sup>

Eastman inserted a statement of policy in the Masses in January, 1913, and it ran permanently in the magazine. This masthead statement tells us a great deal about the magazine's spirit:

This magazine is owned and published cooperatively by its editors. It has no dividends to pay, and nobody is trying to make money out of it. A Revolutionary and not a reform magazine; a magazine with a sense of humor and no respect for the respectable. Frank, arrogant, impertinent, searching for true causes; a magazine directed against rigidity and dogma wherever it is found: printing what is too naked or true for a money-making press; a magazine whose final policy is to do as it pleases and conciliate nobody, not even its readers--there is a field for this publication in America.<sup>17</sup>

Eastman's assertion that there was room for this flamboyant combination of revolution and freedom was proved by the quality of writers attracted to the Masses and the range of its crusades. The 30,000 readers of this magazine were treated to the writing of Eastman, Floyd Dell, John Reed, Ernest Poole, Sherwood Anderson, James Oppenheim, Djuna Barnes, Vachel Lindsay, Amy Lowell, William Carlos Williams, Babette Deutsch, Bertrand Russell, Maxim Gorky, Bernard Shaw, Stuart Chase, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Elmer Rice, Romain Rolland, Carl Sandburg, Siegfried Sasson, Upton Sinclair, Horace Traubel, Louis Untermeyer, and Elinor Wylie. Integrated with this writing was the brilliant ash-can art and cartooning of George Bellows,

John Sloan, Art Young, and Robert Minor. The magazine was always involved in crusades and controversy. Its cartoons attacked clergymen, immigration officials, big business and political leaders. It fought for free love, birth control, suffrage, and the single tax. The diversity of the magazine was a direct product of its independence. Eastman was determined to avoid dogmatic narrowness:

This freedom from dogma enabled us to join independently in the struggle for racial equality and women's rights, for intelligent sex relations...for birth and population control. Socialist dogma declared that all these problems would be solved when the economy of capitalism was replaced by a co-operative commonwealth. I was convinced to the contrary. Indeed, I was not at any point millennial in my thoughts about the commonwealth.<sup>18</sup>

Floyd Dell became managing editor in December, 1913. He agreed entirely with Eastman's emphasis on independence, and brought to the magazine his love for poetry and his critical acumen. John Reed also joined the magazine and with his multiple interests he too emphasized freedom:

We refuse to commit ourselves to any course of action except this: to do with the Masses what we please...The broad purpose of the Masses is a social one: to everlastingly attack old systems, old morals, old prejudices....We intend to be arrogant, impertinent, in bad taste, but not vulgar. We will be bound by no one creed or theory of social reform, but will express them all, providing they be radical.<sup>19</sup>

This union of an exciting diversity of art and a broad but definitely revolutionary vision made the Masses a significant and influential journal. It could move its readers to laughter and to reflection. The Masses was an expression of the mood of the pre-war radical-intellectual

community; it reflected the community's gaiety, diversity, radical fervor, flamboyancy and iconoclasm. It was sensitive to all new winds, whither they involved a new form of poetry or a new movement toward liberation. After five brilliant years Max Eastman looked back at the accomplishments of the Masses in an editorial of September, 1917. He felt that the magazine's main contribution to American social revolutionary philosophy was its "resolute opposition to bigotry and dogmatic thinking of all kinds."<sup>20</sup>

Looking back at the Masses from the 1930s, Joseph Freeman wrote that the magazine was unaffiliated with any party and formally owed allegiance to no single cause. Yet "as individual writers and artists, the Masses group championed two causes: socialism and free art. Sometimes these two were fused; at other times they clashed."<sup>21</sup> The synthesis of art and politics is a difficult task; the Masses was generally successful due to its broad views and its flexibility. But, as Freeman pointed out, the synthesis could break down. Beneath the colorful surface the Masses group struggled with the problems of bringing together social message and imaginative craft. Their efforts resulted in the successful product; but the pressure of international events soon cracked the delicate union.

The Masses group did not face the historical pressures that radical writers of the depression would face. Yet despite the variety and good natured humor of this early radical periodical, there was still a nagging conflict

between the pictorial artists who demanded complete freedom and the editors who attempted to control the magazine's political message.

Max Eastman recalled this struggle to integrate art and socialism in the Masses in a series of articles in the 1934 Modern Monthly magazine. Much like Floyd Dell, Eastman was divided between his private and public self, his emotional love for poetry and his intellectual commitment to the worker's cause. Eastman came to the Masses after finishing a book on the enjoyment of poetry and writing his first volume of poems. He felt that these books touched only indirectly upon the social struggle in which he believed. He felt that in order to be a full man, a poet ought to take an active role in the social struggle, and with this goal in mind he became editor of the Masses. Eastman called for an honest, open, diverse socialism, but, he insists, he made his revolutionary intentions clear in his first editorial:

The end we have in view...is an economic and social revolution. And by Revolution...we mean a radical democratization of industry and society...to be accomplished only when and if the spirit of liberty and rebellion is sufficiently awakened in the classes which are now oppressed. A revolution is a sweeping change accomplished through the conquest of power by a subjected class.<sup>23</sup>

Opposed to dogma but insisting on revolutionary purpose, Eastman still ran into difficulty in his editorship. In particular, editors Eastman and Dell, despite their flexibility, fought with the pictorial artists over the questions of editorial leadership and artistic freedom.

Many of the artists rejected the attempts of editors to add overt political captions to their cartoons. Dell recalls that although the artists considered themselves socialists, "their views represented a fairly undifferentiated mass of anarchism, communish, feminism, and republicanism," and that the staff fights were "usually over the question of intelligibility and propaganda verses freedom." Despite the magazine's variety, some of the artists felt Eastman and Dell suppressed artistic freedom.

Eastman viewed the conflict as one of Bohemian aestheticism and free-for-all individual expression against his editorship and policy control. The issue was fought out in three meetings in the Spring of 1916. The artists, led by John Sloan, called for an abandonment of the offices of editor and managing editor and a strict rejection of anything resembling policy. After many discussions and votes, democratic proceedings and debate, the issue was resolved and those favoring a diverse but necessarily socialistic and revolutionary magazine won a victory. Eastman said the magazine continued as a non-propaganda but socialist magazine; he was elected as editor once more and he continued to shape a magazine dedicated to art and revolution. The conflict was resolved by democratic procedure. The conflict would reappear in the radical periodicals of the 1930s and be magnified by the economic and social crisis.

Despite the conflict, then, the Masses remained a lusty and gay journal which, on the whole, successfully



integrated art and socialism. This integration disappeared in the period immediately after World War I as the mood of the country shifted from this innocent synthesis to the extremes of gaudy materialism and artistic alienation. Radicalism became a more serious business as suppression increased at home and the Russian Revolution offered an uncompromising example abroad. Irving Howe is one of many who lamented the period after the war, for "as our radicalism took a disastrous plunge into a peculiarly sterile form of communism, the spirit of the Masses would be dead."<sup>26</sup>

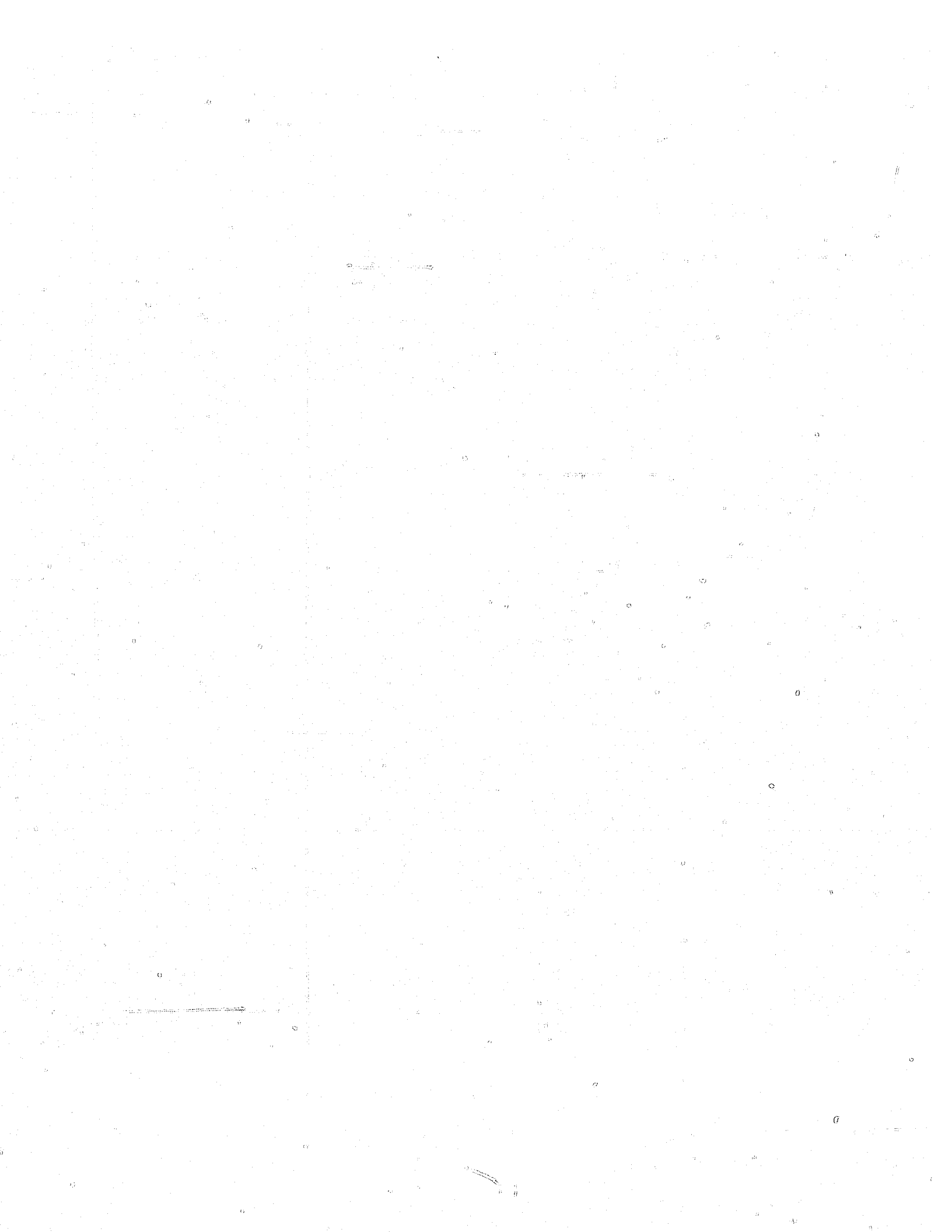
This spirit was not recaptured until the Partisan Review emerged with its gathering of many of the most brilliant writers of the era, all dedicated to both art and radicalism.

While the Russian Revolution was expressed in the United States, it was expressed in a more subtle way. It formed the delicate base for the Masses. It was difficult to maintain in the post-war climate. As Lewis Mumford points out in his excellent study of American radical culture that "the fervent hopes and pervasive optimism of the progressive era were both casualties of the war."<sup>27</sup> The general feeling that art and social purpose could be joined was temporarily smothered. The liberal attitude of the Wilson administration toward dissent disappeared with the pressures of a foreign war and the threatening specter of the Russian Revolution. The government moved against the Masses in August, 1917, using the Espionage Act of that year.

Eastman, Dell, Reed, Art Young, and others. On the basis of one poem, four were hanged. Two trials resulted in two hung juries. The government to convict the Nazis for the victory for the Villagers, for the Nazis with the November-December issue of 1918.

The Masses was revived in the Masses but not without significant change. The simultaneously interested in artistic and revolutionary politics was not tolerated in the Masses. Although this magazine doubled the circulation of its predecessor, it took on a new orientation. The Masses. John Reed's coverage of the Russian Revolution was a factor, as was the rise of Michael F. Adams, who later steer the New Masses into the orbit of literary orthodoxy. But, foremost, it was the rise of the new that was responsible.

The December 1918 issue of Literature reflected this mood in Floyd Dell's review of Max Eastman's Life of Life, a volume of poetry prefaced by Eastman's statement that he had given his energies, but not his heart, to the revolution. Dell, despite his own warlike tendencies, his own preference for poetry over propaganda, praised his friend Eastman for his broad choice of subject matter. Dell observed that Eastman might prefer poetry to prose but in 1918 there was really no choice, for it is more interesting to talk truth than to create beauty....The



integrated art and socialism. This integration disappeared in the period immediately after World War I as the mood of the country shifted from this innocent synthesis to the extremes of gaudy materialism and artistic alienation. Radicalism became a more serious business as suppression increased at home and the Russian Revolution offered an uncompromising example abroad. Irving Howe is one of many who lamented the period after the war, for "as our radicalism took a disastrous plunge into a peculiarly sterile form of communism, the spirit of the Masses would be dead."<sup>26</sup> This spirit was not recaptured until the Partisan Review emerged in the 1930s with its gathering of many of the most brilliant writers of the era, all dedicated to both art and radical change.

While this dual concern with art and revolution was expressed in the pre-war Village and formed the delicate base for the Masses magazine, it was difficult to maintain in the post-war climate. Richard Pells points out in his excellent study of American radical culture that "the fervent hopes and pervasive optimism of the progressive era were both casualties of the war."<sup>27</sup> The general feeling that art and social purpose could be joined was temporarily smothered. The liberal attitude of the Wilson administration toward dissent disappeared with the pressures of a foreign war and the threatening specter of the Russian Revolution. The government moved against the Masses in August, 1917, using the Espionage Act of that year.

Eastman, Dell, Reed, Art Young, and others were indicted on the basis of one poem, four cartoons, and four articles. Two trials resulted in two hung juries; the inability of the government to convict the Masses group was no real victory for the Villagers, for the Masses magazine died with the November-December issue of 1917.<sup>28</sup>

The Masses was revived in the Liberator magazine, but not without significant change. The ability to remain simultaneously interested in artistic freedom and revolutionary politics was not tolerated in the Liberator. Although this magazine doubled the circulation of its predecessor, it took on a new seriousness foreign to the Masses. John Reed's coverage of the Russian Revolution was a factor, as was the rise of Michael Gold who would later steer the New Masses into the orbit of communist orthodoxy. But, foremost, it was the mood of the new era that was responsible.

The December 1918 issue of Liberator reflected this mood in Floyd Dell's review of Max Eastman's Colors of Life, a volume of poetry prefaced by Eastman's confession that he had given his energies, but not his heart, to the revolution. Dell, despite his own warring tendencies and his own preference for poetry over propaganda, chided his friend Eastman for his broad choice of subject matter. Dell observed that Eastman might prefer poetry to politics, but in 1918 there was really no choice, for it is "more interesting to talk truth than to create beauty....How can

one be an artist in a time when the morning paper may tell of another Bolshevik revolution somewhere?"<sup>29</sup> This was the pressure of the mood of post-war America finding voice in the Liberator.

Joseph Freeman joined the staff of the Liberator along with Dell, Eastman, the poet Claude McKay, and Michael Gold. Despite this diverse staff, the Liberator moved dogmatically left. It ignored Eliot's The Waste Land (1922) to concentrate on wage cuts and Sacco and Vanzetti. McKay and Eastman both resigned in protest as the rigidity of the Liberator became increasingly evident. And then between 1922 and 1924 the Liberator became a Workers' Party organ officially tied to the communist party. Significantly the magazine moved its office to party headquarters on East Eleventh Street, the un-bohemian section east of the Village inhabited not by artists, but by trade-union workers. The Liberator then merged with several party papers and faded into obscurity as a political journal.

Along with its unofficial voice, the Masses, the unique mixture of avant garde art and radical politics that was the Village fell prey to the post-war mood. Malcolm Cowley observed that the war separated the two currents of art and radicalism and people were suddenly forced to take sides. For this new generation Cowley felt that life was less colorful and joyous, more standardized, tawdry and uncreative. This change in mood caused the writers of the twenties to feel "like strangers in their own land."<sup>30</sup>

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This feeling underlies much of the great literature of that decade: Hemingway's methodical search for values in a world that seems to invite nihilism; Fitzgerald's recreation of the gaudy spree when an entire nation spent much more than it was able to renew; Lewis' exposure of Main Street and Babbitt. Their disillusionment was typical of the decade. Many writers left for exile in Europe; many rebels gave up independence and sought political direction from established dogmas. The Village went with the times; it raised its rents, opened many new restaurants and became increasingly commercial. Floyd Dell observed that now there "appeared a kind of professional Villager playing his antics in public for pay and profit."<sup>31</sup>

This era of pay and profit that brought disillusionment and rigidity nevertheless brought glitter and increasing material wealth to many in America. The election of Herbert Hoover in 1928 was almost a foregone conclusion. He had only to speak of continuing the traditions of Harding Normalcy and Coolidge Prosperity. In accepting the Republican nomination Hoover spoke of the disappearance of unemployment and the final victory over poverty.<sup>32</sup> Many looked around at the Ford roadsters, raccoon coats, hip flasks, and saxophones and were satisfied. It took a severe crisis to break the country of this stultifying materialism and corresponding artistic disenchantment and to resurrect the spirit of radical art embodied in the Masses.



CHAPTER II: THE DEPRESSION AND THE RESPONSE OF THE  
INTELLECTUAL LEFT

Between 1929 and 1933 the whole structure of American society seemed actually to be going to pieces.

Edmund Wilson

There has never been a period when literary events followed so closely on the flying coattails of social events.

Malcolm Cowley

Which side are you on, boys? Which side are you on?

Mrs. Sam Reece, union organizer  
and song-writer

How can a writer live through such a period and remain untouched? He may have no formal philosophy to guide him, no science to illuminate the torrent of events; he may loath logic and rely entirely upon immediate observation, sensibility, and emotion. But, if he is a writer at all, he deals with experience; and in our time, simply to record experience is to record aspects of universal conflict and the most profound social transformation in the history of mankind.

Joseph Freeman on the 1930s

The depression of the 1930s manifested itself in a variety of ways: people lost their jobs, waited in soup lines, brooded in despair, escaped to the movies, and marched on picket lines. The era's intellectuals were affected also. Here we will examine the economic crisis that they witnessed and their responses to this crisis. Specifically, we will focus on the widespread desire expressed by many of the decade's intellectuals to become involved with the social problems of the 1930s without relinquishing their artistic freedom and independence.

Despite the implicit warning of the best writers of the 1920s that the jazz age was rotten at the core, and despite the alienation of many of the nation's intellectuals, there were those who felt the glittering bubble of that era would not burst. In accepting the nomination of the Republican party in August, 1928, Hoover said "we shall soon, with the help of God, be within sight of the day when poverty will be banished from the nation."<sup>1</sup> Hoover was speaking near the end of a decade of official confidence; it was also a decade of financial speculation. Almost imperceptibly the economic center of the country had shifted to finance capitalism, a shaky, overdrawn system of credit and speculation. In 1920 the country registered twenty-nine thousand stockbrokers, but by the decade's end there were seventy-one thousand. So accepted was this economic gambling that in the summer of 1929 John J. Raskob, formerly a top executive with General

Motors and then chairman of the Democratic National Committee, told a gathering of businessmen how they could and should become rich:

If a man saves fifteen dollars a week and invests in good common stocks, and allows the dividends and rights to accumulate, at the end of twenty years he will have at least eighty thousand dollars and an income from investments of around four hundred dollars a month. He will be rich. And because income can do that, I am firm in my belief that anyone not only can be rich, but ought to be rich.<sup>2</sup>

So many believed this that by September 3, 1929, stocks had reached an all time high. Over one and a half million people were investing in the market. But speculation began to replace real investment; people bought stocks for quick profit rather than long term dividends. This speculation caused an inflation of true stock values. This inflation was officially encouraged by the extension of credit and the lack of controls on speculation. In retrospect, the entire market system seemed set up to inflate sky high, ripe for bursting. As one senior partner in a large Chicago brokerage house said:

The Crash--it didn't happen in one day. There were a great many warnings. The country was crazy. Everybody was in the stockmarket, whether he could afford it or not. Shoeshine boys and waiters and capitalists....A great many holding company pyramids were unsound, really fictitious values...It was a mad dream of get-rich-quick.<sup>3</sup>

An economic system that had suffered through economic panics in 1837, 1857, 1877, and 1907 was again called into question. Besides a public encouraged and eager to speculate, the late twenties were characterized by corporations willing to increase production and profits

but unwilling to allow wages to keep pace with production. The result was a market overwhelmed with its own products. Even during the boom of the 20s, the farmer had been overlooked, and his plight foreshadowed the fate of many in the 1930s. Crops were in oversupply during the 20s and the corresponding low prices brought poverty to many farmers. Manufacturers during the 20s began to glut the market with luxury items that brought an immediate but short-lived demand. During the 20s the output per worker rose by 40 per cent; technology greatly increased production capacity. Yet salaries were raised by an average of only seven per cent during the decade.<sup>4</sup> So as production soared and buying power dropped, huge inventories of unsold goods began to accumulate. In an economy increasingly controlled by large interdependent corporations, this unsound practice of increasing production without increasing the buying market brought about a strain which was complicated by rigidity, dishonesty, and false confidence. In 1929 it all fell apart.

On Thursday, October 24, stocks dropped three billion dollars. Many small investors were wiped out but the larger bankers met and were able to hold up the market. However, nothing could stop the landslide on the following Tuesday, October 29, when stocks dropped fourteen billion dollars. On this day sixteen million shares were sold and brokers literally fought each other to the buyers, tearing clothing and hair and screaming. The New York

Times described the sound from the floor as "an eerie roar."<sup>5</sup> Within two weeks twenty-six billion dollars in stock values had been lost; this was 40 per cent of all values listed on the exchange. Variety summed it up on October 30 with its headline: Wall Street Lays An Egg.

This was, of course, only a loss of paper profits and values. But a chain effect soon spread throughout the economy that was visible to concerned intellectuals. The crash was inevitably followed by wage cuts and unemployment as corporations sought to limit their losses. By February 1930, bread lines in the Bowery were drawing two thousand people daily and by the end of that year every fourth factory worker in Muncie, Indiana--America's Middletown--had lost his job. The national income dwindled from eighty-one billion dollars in 1929 to sixty-eight in 1930 to its bottom of forty-one billion dollars in 1932. The country's estimated wealth in this span shrank from three hundred sixty-five billion dollars to two hundred thirty-nine billion. There were eighty-five thousand business failures reported in three years.<sup>6</sup> Ironically, the decade of the twenties ended with the bankruptcy of the Stutz Motor Car Company, producers of the Bearcat, the car often associated with the gay flappers of that decade.

By the winter of 1932 official estimates listed one fourth of the nation as unemployed. Despite official assurance that "no one has starved," hunger was common as was loss of housing. New York City welfare counted

twenty-nine deaths from starvation in 1933 while fifty more were treated for starvation and one hundred and ten deaths, mostly of children, were attributed to malnutrition. Similar outbreaks of starvation were recorded in all major cities. The poor in Oakland, California, lived in sewer pipes that the manufacturer could not sell; in Pennsylvania unemployed steelworkers camped near the warm ovens that had formerly offered a livelihood; every big city had its Hoovervilles with the dispossessed living in barrels, piano boxes, and coffins.<sup>7</sup>

Hoover could do little to stop the spread of these camps of poverty, hunger, and despair that bore his name. He continued to stress the fundamental soundness of business in this country and to practice, at best, a kind of laissez-faire individualism and at worst a rich man's welfare with the Reconstruction Finance Corporation lending government money to large corporations. This official optimism was preached by others: Treasury Secretary Andrew Mellon could "see nothing...in the present situation that is either menacing or warrants pessimism"; Henry Ford said that the "so-called" hard time was good for building character as his payroll dropped from one hundred twenty-eight thousand workers to thirty-seven thousand in a few short years.<sup>8</sup> Manhattan Mayor Jimmy Walker asked the area theatres to show nothing but cheerful pictures while the nation's billboards began prematurely to ask, "Wasn't the Depression Terrible?" The Lions Club proclaimed the week of October 9, 1930 as Business Confidence Week.<sup>9</sup>

Others saw a larger problem and attempted deeper reform. The election of Roosevelt brought some hope and his New Deal promised an era of action that the early 1930s had sadly lacked. But despite the proliferation of programs, the Roosevelt administration did not ultimately break the depression with its many experimental ideas. In August, 1937, the nation was well into the New Deal, yet the national industrial output took its sharpest drop in history, worse than in 1930. During this "Roosevelt recession" unemployment again climbed past the ten million mark. Only the call to war halted the Depression. War is an efficient disposer of surplus goods and people; and with fifteen million men in uniform and factories producing guns, planes, ships and ammunition to be soon blown up, the country made a dubious recovery from its most severe economic crisis.<sup>10</sup> Alfred Kazin recalled the true end to the Depression:

One day in the fall of 1940 when the U. S. had begun to rearm on a great scale, I sat in a newsreel theatre on Broadway looking at lines of tanks and heavy guns lumbering heavily, busily, cheerfully out of the factories like new automobiles, and knew that the depression was over.<sup>11</sup>

This decade of economic depression had a deep impact on the people. Speaking of the curious fact that the trauma of the Depression is often repressed and has become an "invisible scar," Caroline Bird pointed out that "if you went by contemporary references to the Depression, you might get the idea that the Depression was a faceless

menace. In truth, it was as explicit as a statistic, as tangible as a wound. Above all, it was a series of real events in actual time."<sup>12</sup> It affected everything from women's fashions, to patterns of marriage and childbirth, to the growth of the amusement industry, to a corresponding architectural simplicity. The human toll is uncountable; it continues to affect an entire generation in their desire for economic security. Of most importance to this study, the Depression affected a decade of intellectuals. Moved by the spectacle of a general economic collapse and the consequent dispossession of the people, the writers used their art to detail the widespread suffering and bewilderment brought about by what most construed to be the abuses of the capitalistic system.

There were, of course, many different responses to the Depression that writers saw and documented. Some people suffered through the economic crisis with an inner despair, bewilderment and sense of betrayal. This inner despair was frighteningly documented in the works of Nathanael West. West often acknowledged his leftist politics and his name appears on many of the key ideological documents of the decade. Yet his novels do not specifically point to a particular political stance; rather they document the nightmarish aspects of the decade. Miss Lonelyhearts (1932) concerns a newspaper columnist who must answer letters from all those who are desperate, lonely, and sick-of-it-all. Miss Lonelyhearts was, of course,



confronted with the immediate problems of people experiencing economic crisis, but the book goes beyond the scope of West's economic observations to become a lucid vision of universal suffering and a search for meaning in a time of apocalyptic horror:

As far as he could discover, there were no signs of spring. The decay that covered the surface of the mottled ground was not the kind in which life generates. Last year, he remembered, May had failed to quicken these soiled fields. It had taken all of July to torture a few green spikes through the exhausted dirt....Tomorrow, in his column, he would ask Brokenhearted, Sick-of-it-all, Desperate, Disillusioned-with-tubercular-husband and the rest of his correspondents to come here and water the soil with their tears.<sup>13</sup>

West treated the theme of apocalypse again in Day of the Locust, a brilliant evocation of the bewilderment, anger and hunger for spectacle that lay barely below the surface throughout the depression. Like a great deal of the decade's fiction, West's works detail the underside of the American dream, the anger that lies in the wake of the unfulfilled promise of success and happiness. This is a political theme and an indictment of a specific system, but in the hands of a skilled author it becomes a record of the widespread and often harsh discrepancy between all our hopeful ideals and the actual reality. Day of the Locust is set in Hollywood, a modern Babylon filled with hustlers, grotesques, and clowns. Here is the setting of the final act of the American dream turned nightmare. People came to California to retire and live in comfort, but they found only empty promises, boredom and death. The entire

existence was a violent one, with its cock fights, vicious parties, and ruthless competition which culminated at the world premier at Kahn's Persian Palace Theatre.

Once there they discovered that sunshine isn't enough. They get tired of oranges....Nothing happens. They don't know what to do with their time. They haven't the mental equipment for leisure, the money nor the physical equipment for pleasure....Their boredom becomes more and more terrible. They realize that they've been tricked and burn with resentment. Every day of their lives they read the newspapers and went to the movies. Both fed them on lynchings, murder, sex crimes, explosions, wrecks, love nests, fires, miracles, revolutions, wars. This daily diet made sophisticates of them. The sun is a joke. Oranges can't titillate their jaded palates. Nothing can ever be violent enough to make taut their slack minds and bodies. They have been cheated and betrayed. They have saved and saved for nothing.<sup>14</sup>

West saw and recorded a lingering sense of despair and bewilderment in the 1930s, which was inherited from the jazz age and heightened by economic insecurity--there were other responses to the era's social problems. Many turned to various forms of escape. There was a boom in checkers, monopoly, puzzles, chess, dominoes, badminton, ping-pong and hobbies. In the summer of 1930 the miniature golf business grew rapidly. Paople danced the Suzy-Q, Big Apple, Lindy Hop, and Lambeth Walk. They followed the exploits of Joe Louis and Joe Di Maggio. There was a radio boom and it is estimated that by the end of the decade eighty-six per cent of the population (twenty-eight million homes) owned a radio. The average listening time was four and a half hours a day. Movies offered a good escape and people gathered to see Jean Harlow, Mae West, Shirley

Temple, Bette Davis, Clark Gable, and the animated features of Walt Disney. Between 1930 and 1940 the space given over to comics and pictures in newspapers doubled.

Beyond the feelings of hopelessness and despair and a widespread desire to escape, many directed their feelings of anger toward the system itself. One woman recalled that it was President Roosevelt's cufflinks that started her thinking. She read in the paper that he had many pairs of cufflinks with rubies and precious stones and she and her whole family were hungry. She said she'd never forget her realization of the discrepancy between wealth and poverty:

I was sitting out there in the hot sun, there weren't any trees. And I was wondering why it is that one man could have all those cufflinks when we couldn't even have enough to eat. When we lived on gravy and biscuits. That's the first time I remember ever wondering why.<sup>15</sup>

There were many 'whys' at this time, and these discrepancies were visible to the socially concerned. Why, with one-quarter of the nation unemployed and with millions dispossessed and hungry, did Alfred Sloan make \$516,311 for a year's work as president of General Motors? Why did George Hill make \$380,976 as president of American Tobacco? Why did William Randolph Hearst make \$500,000 a year just from his publishing business? Why, with twenty-five million people on relief, did Barbara Hutton, the Woolworth heiress, receive forty-five million dollars on her twenty-first birthday? This was at a time when the five-and-ten-cent store boomed with a twenty per cent increase in net

profit during 1933, yet Woolworth sales girls had their pay cut to \$11 per week.<sup>16</sup>

The spectacle of the economic crash and its harsh human toll together with the existence of these blatant discrepancies caused many to question the present system and to seek alternatives. Upton Sinclair questioned the sight of a nation of hungry people when there were crop surpluses in the West. Sinclair had been a writer and intellectual for decades, and he was now running for office with the EPIC party, End Poverty in California. Sinclair was endorsed by Dreiser and MacLeish in his effort to capture the state in 1934. Sinclair proposed turning over the unused land and idle factories of the state to the workers. Other political parties and schemes proliferated. The Technocracy movement called for scientific design and management of industry, a sixteen hour work week and \$20,000 per year per family. Father Coughlin and his National Union for Social Justice spoke to a radio audience of thirty million people in his plea for a radical redistribution of wealth. Huey P. Long wanted to make every man a king in his share the wealth plan. Father Devine brought heavenly sweetness to his earthy churches. Dr. Townsend sought to provide a guaranteed income to the elderly, thus stimulating the economy. The Southern Agrarians called for a return to a benevolent feudalism. There was a 'Ham and Eggs Every Thursday' movement. There was also an alarming growth of fascist organizations during the 1930s,

promising an end to the Depression through an all-powerful state. Roosevelt's New Deal incorporated many elements of these diverse plans in his experiments aimed at halting the depression and curbing the growing anger and militancy.

In the winter of 1930-1931 Lloyd's of London announced that for the first time they were selling riot and civil-commotion insurance in quantity to American customers. The anger was mounting. The New York Times printed many stories on civil disobedience at this time, such as the January 21, 1931 article on the food riot in Oklahoma City and the February 26, 1931 article on the grocery store raid in Minneapolis. There were hunger marches in all major cities. Men in breadlines seized bread trucks; hungry citizens sacked foodstores. Will Rogers warned that if "you let this country go hungry, and they are going to eat no matter what happens to Budgets, Income Taxes or Wall Street Values. Washington mustn't forget who rules when it come to a showdown."<sup>17</sup>

In the Spring of 1932 Hoover sent a secret message to Congress advising it not to cut the pay of Army and Navy personnel because the government might soon need their troops to put down revolution.<sup>18</sup> Hoover immediately used these troops in July, 1932, when he ordered Douglas Mac Arthur and Dwight Eisenhower to attack the peaceful shanty town erected in Washington, D. C. by the Bonus Army, a group of WWI vets organized to demand their bonus pay early. Hoover feared communist conspiracy but later investigations

failed to substantiate these charges. Sherwood Anderson led a group of writers to the White House to protest the use of soldiers against unarmed vets, but Hoover refused to see these concerned intellectuals.<sup>19</sup>

It was not only veterans who organized in the 1930s; the most surprising militancy came from the midwestern farm belt, traditionally a conservative republican stronghold. These farmers organized to protest low milk prices, governmental regulation of the dairy industry, and increasing mortgage foreclosures. One Iowa farmer said:

This was at the time that mortgaging of farms was getting home to us. So they was having ten cent sales. They'd put up a farmer's property and have a sale and all the neighbors'd come in, and they got the idea of spending twenty-five cents for a horse. They was paying ten cents for a plow. And when it was all over, they'd give it back to him. It was legal, and anybody that bid against that thing, that was trying to get that man's land, they would be dealt with seriously, as it were.<sup>20</sup>

Militancy also grew in the labor movement in the 1930s. There were open outbreaks of class warfare in Detroit in 1932, in Minneapolis in 1934, San Francisco in 1934, and Ohio and Wisconsin in 1934. In Chicago on Memorial Day in 1937 police opened up on three hundred protesting steel workers, wounding close to one hundred and killing ten. It was a decade of constant strife with workers organizing and developing new strike tactics and corporate heads building armies of professional strike breakers, Pinkertons and thugs. As historian Robert Goldston saw it, "The Great Depression was teaching lessons.... It was teaching that the old virtues by no means guaranteed

survival, much less success....Class warfare came as close to being a valid definition of American society during the Great Depression as ever in American history."<sup>21</sup>

Economic crisis, then, produced a variety of reactions. Despair, bewilderment, and a desire to escape existed simultaneously with growing anger and militancy. This anger led many to attack the short-comings of capitalism and to involve themselves in the attempt to create a more just system. Nowhere was this involvement more visible than with the artists and intellectuals of the era. Reaction and protest to the crisis varied greatly; but, in general, a significant number of intellectuals moved leftward in the political spectrum. This movement took various forms: petitions were signed, demonstrations were held, large congresses of artists met to discuss various ways to make their art deal with the crisis, and intellectuals committed themselves to an investigation of the American scene. On the whole this was an important movement which led to the creation of a diverse body of fiction both strong in its protest and exciting in its imagination.

Actually, for many this new era of artistic involvement was a welcome change from the alienation of the 1920s. Writers and intellectuals no longer were met with material hypocrisy, glitter, and sham when they looked around; the suspected defects of capitalism had been exposed and, despite widespread suffering, artists saw hopeful signs of change in the crisis. In the epilogue to Exile's Return

Malcolm Cowley described a New Year's Eve party at the end of the twenties which turned hellish, smoky, tainted and nightmarish while harsh winter waited outside. Cowley recalled that the frenzied twenties ended in a similar way for they were quick, exciting years, easy to be young in "and yet on coming out of them one felt a sense of relief, as on coming out of a room too full of talk and people into the sunlight of the winter streets."<sup>22</sup> The twenties were gone and writers faced a new decade with new challenges. The artificial party was over and writers responded to the morning after with relief. As Cowley said in the communist Daily Worker in 1932, "it wasn't the depression that got me, it was the boom." Cowley felt that the depression decade was welcomed by many writers for they had been very unhappy in the boom days, days dominated by the writer's natural enemy, the businessman.<sup>23</sup>

Edmund Wilson voiced a similar idea when he said that "to the writers and artists of my generation who had grown up in the Big Business era and had always resented its barbarism...these years [the 1930s] were not depressing but stimulating. One couldn't help being exhilarated by the sudden and unexpected collapse of that stupid gigantic fraud."<sup>24</sup> Writers were now forced outward to view the social and economic scene. They were still intensely individual, but the private alienation of the 1920s was replaced by an ideal of collective social action. Writers were not disillusioned by the economic collapse; their



disillusionment had come earlier. Now they were challenged by the sight of a country seeking action and answers rather than jazz and pleasure. William Phillips, editor of the Partisan Review, said the depression decade was a time:

when articulate people talked more about the hope for an ideal society than the benefits of the existing one. It was a time when responsibility meant responsibility to ideas and convictions, justice seemed more important than expediency, the greater good meant more than the lesser evil, dreams seemed more cogent than reality.<sup>25</sup>

There is no mysterious cause for this general movement. In a decade framed by economic collapse at one end and world war at the other, writers and intellectuals were forced to turn part of their attention to the social scene and spend some of their energy seeking alternatives to a bankrupt system. The movement might well be explained as both a continuing negative reaction to certain aspects of the American system carried over from the disillusionment of the 1920s and heightened by the depression, and as a positive identification with the radical movement of the 1930s.

The negative reaction was best articulated by Edmund Wilson in his powerful account of the death of the American myth of the poor boy who makes good. The old romance pictured a boy who worked his way up and gained success; but the reality of capitalism, Wilson said, had turned out to be a millionaire's society with the masses left to go hungry or to work jobs that alienate and destroy. Wilson felt that no one in the U. S. could

really love our meaningless life, where the manufacturer raises the workers' wages only in order to create a demand for the gadgets which for better or worse he happens to have an interest in selling, while agriculture goes hang, and science and art are left to be exploited by the commercial laboratories...or to be fed in a haphazard way by a dole from the fortunes of rich men who have been conscience stricken.<sup>26</sup>

Malcolm Cowley spoke often of the positive sense of radical identification that was felt in the 1930s. The writer felt a comradeship, an end to isolation. The decade's air of militant involvement was a welcome change from the smug indifference of the 1920s. Cowley believed that the revolutionary movement could and would do more for the writer than the writer could do for the movement. Benefits of this new feeling of social purpose included, Cowley felt, a new, eager and responsive audience. This movement leftward also brought the writer a whole new range of subjects. Thirdly, the revolutionary movement could give the writer a new perspective on himself, for he would no longer be an isolated individual but rather a fundamental part of a vast whole. Fourthly, Cowley felt that the revolutionary movement united the writer with the working class rather than with the interest of a decaying bourgeoisie.<sup>27</sup>

Thus, due to the easily observed inadequacies of the present system and to a new positive feeling of the decade, writers moved leftward. The communist party played a significant role in this action. For example, in October of 1932 at the peak of the Presidential election fifty-two leading artists and intellectuals signed a pamphlet entitled

"Culture and Crisis," and supported the communist party candidate for president. The pamphlet was a militant statement; it read, in part:

Very well, we strike hands with our true comrades. We claim our own and we reject the disorder, the lunacy spawned by grabbers....It is our business to think and we shall not permit business men to teach us our business. It is also, in the end, our business to act. We have acted. As responsible intellectual workers we have aligned ourselves with the frankly revolutionary Communist Party, the party of the workers.

This statement was signed by Malcolm Cowley, Edmund Wilson, Sherwood Anderson, Theodore Dreiser, Erskine Caldwell, Lincoln Steffens, Matthew Josephson, James Rorty, Newton Arvin, John Dos Passos, Langston Hughes, and many other prominent intellectuals.<sup>28</sup>

In addition to this widespread support for the party presidential candidate in 1932, many looked to the Russian system as an alternative. At the time of the worst of the depression in America, Russia was moving forward in her five-year plans; many sensed a positive economic direction in communism that seemed sadly lacking in our crisis-ridden economy. It is recorded that at one point during the depression, Amtorg, the Russian trading office in New York, was getting 350 applications a day from Americans who wanted to settle in Russia.<sup>29</sup>

Communism offered not only an apparently successful alternative to capitalism, Marxist theory also seemed to offer an explanation for the present crisis in America. The communists also supported many of the same causes that

American intellectuals became interested in: it organized workers in coal mines, textile factories and fruit farms; it organized hunger marches in the cities; it defended blacks in the struggle against racism; it organized resistance to eviction.

Yet, there was widespread distrust of the communist party. American intellectuals were often especially suspicious of Joseph Stalin. They often viewed his regime as a repressive one, contrary to the revolutionary spirit of classical Marxism. The news of purges, political trials, and police tactics from Moscow in the early 1930s were damaging to the communist party; the spectacle of compromise of revolutionary principles in Stalin's various foreign policy decisions in the late 1930s was disastrous. The communist party, then, was not the all pervasive influence during the decade that it might have been. The reasons given for the failure of the party to gain more widespread support during a decade of capitalist failure are numerous. We will examine their rigidity and dogmatism in the literary field. In general, this rigidity also affected the party in its social and economic efforts.

Intellectuals for the most part joined the revolutionary movement as fellow travelers, not as orthodox party members. They were more influenced by the era itself than by the ideology of a single party. This independence was a source of strength in the decade's fiction. Granville Hicks, himself a one time party member, saw that the better

writers of the decade went their own way. Looking back, Hicks saw that there were novelists who accepted the literary formula of the straight party line, "but probably they were third-rate novelists to begin with....on the whole left literature was always independent of political and critical dogmas."<sup>30</sup>

This widespread independent engagement can be best illustrated by a brief look at key intellectual figures of the decade, their social commitment and freedom from dogma.

In 1932 The Modern Quarterly conducted a symposium entitled "Whither the American Writers" which sought to give an important group of American intellectuals the chance to comment on the relationship between art and society. Except for a single dogmatic view, the writers polled stressed the need for a radical yet independent response to the decade's crisis. Malcolm Cowley responded to the questionnaire. He felt that the collapse of capitalism was inevitable and that the writer must take part in the social crisis because it was his job to participate in every important struggle or else risk having his talent shrivel away. Yet Cowley stressed that there was no time for an artist to join a political party or do party work. Cowley felt that intellectuals should strive not for narrow proletarian fiction but for the broader category of "revolutionary literature."<sup>31</sup>

Cowley was aware that a too rigid political ideology could be detrimental to art. In his address to

the second American Writers Congress, Cowley stressed that revolutionary artists should not be too narrow in scope nor should Marxist critics concentrate solely on content and neglect form and style. He said that the period was producing a great deal of sound work, opening up new subject areas, and producing many promising new writers; but he also said that there was a danger of narrowness and rigidity.<sup>32</sup>

In looking back at the decade from a perspective of thirty years, Cowley was able to remember the romance and radical hope of the times as well as the danger of dogmatism. He characterized the era as one of alternatives, with almost everyone offering a scheme for saving the country. Cowley himself helped write the Culture and Crisis pamphlet which gave the support of many intellectuals to the communist party presidential candidate. During the writing of the pamphlet he said the party pundits "from the ninth floor"--party headquarters--continually offered "a collection, gritty as crushed limestone, of all the party slogans" which "had the Marxian bad habit of transforming complicated patterns of behavior into words ending with 'ism' and then using the words as if they were mathematical symbols in an algebraic equation."

Cowley was simply not prepared to make the sacrifice of freedom that the party required. He stressed that he was a writer primarily and not a politician. He did feel that the revolutionary movement was very valuable to the

writer, for it carried the writer outside personal affairs. But he felt that those few writers who did join the party seemed to be declining "into party hacks." Viewing the "abysmally low" level of writing in the party press, Cowley said "it was these literary reservations...that kept me from applying for membership." The dream of a triumphant comradeship with the working class kept Cowley in the ranks of the ardent fellow travelers, but he was always plagued with questions and doubts about the party. With all their rhetoric, meetings, marches and party assignments, Cowley asked, "when did the communists get time for making love?" He questioned the habit that the communists had of devoting little time or thought to personal relations: "Was it the right foundation for a new society?"<sup>33</sup>

Alfred Kazin also recalled this period with its heady sense of involvement, movement, and literary crusading. Kazin was a socialist, "like everyone else I knew," yet his socialism was more of a vague hope for a better future than a daily commitment. His socialism included room for literature and he remembered the 30s as a time of reading Blake, Whitman, and Lawrence as well as the newer proletarian writers. He felt nothing but contempt for those doctrinaire radicals who spent their time arguing in the New Masses about whether or not Proust should be read after the revolution. Kazin characterized himself as "a radical, not an ideologue." He believed in a broad socialism and he attacked "the savage proletarian exclusiveness of the communists." His was a "rambling flirtation

with radical ideas" and he did not align himself with the followers of an exclusive creed, those "tireless virtuosi who threw radical argument at each other morning and night."<sup>34</sup>

Edmund Wilson's radicalism can be seen in his turn from his earlier major study of the Symbolist movement in literature in Axel's Castle to his documenting of the social scene and defense of radical literature in his many articles and books published during the 1930s. His sympathy for the working class and his hatred of the capitalist system were blatantly present in his articles for The Nation and The New Republic, yet this Marxist perspective never lapsed into communist rhetoric. This rhetoric was, in fact, the subject of one of Wilson's articles in which he humorously chided the communists for their narrow and self-defeating use of cliché and propaganda.<sup>35</sup>

Wilson's movement to Marxism was prompted both by a desire to go beyond the ironic spectatorial attitudes and proud artistic withdrawal of the 1920s and by a deep distrust of capitalism.<sup>36</sup> In an article entitled "What I Believe" Wilson wrote of his disenchantment with capitalism and his turn to Marxism. He felt that the predictions of Karl Marx were in the process of coming true, for capitalism seemed to be collapsing. Significantly, Wilson saw in Marxism not an economic theory, but psychological insight into the way people behave about money. Wilson found satisfaction in the idea of "the whole world fairly and sensibly run as Russia is now run, instead of by the



acquisitive bankers and business men and the shabby politicians who now run the greater part of it." Wilson called for solidarity from artists in an attempt to "remodel society by the power of imagination and thought."<sup>37</sup>

In his repeated calls for the radical solidarity of artists, Wilson did not demand that the intellectual community adopt a foreign dogma. Wilson suggested that the intellectuals "take communism away from the communists."<sup>38</sup> This was a call for a native radicalism free to respond to the demands of the American situation. Wilson was especially critical of Stalin's brand of communism which he found to be harsh, rigid and false. Wilson said that "one can feel, at this stage, very little hope that any intellectual health will ever come out of Stalinist communism." He felt that the factionalism present in the Stalinist approach to the arts was a tendency quite alien to Marx and Engles. Wilson sought a new society, but not at the expense of intellectual freedom. He envisioned a society in which the superior development of some is not paid for by the exploitation of others. This society would be creative and cooperative as our commercial society could never be. But this society

is a goal to be worked for in the light of one's own imagination and with the help of one's own common sense. The formulas of the various Marxist creeds...no more deserve the status of holy writ than the formulas of other creeds. To accomplish such a task will require of us an unsleeping adaptive exercise of reason and instinct combined.<sup>39</sup>

Like Malcolm Cowley's, Sherwood Anderson's response to the Modern Quarterly's questionnaire "Whither the American Writer" revealed both a desire to participate in the social struggles of the 1930s and a fear of rigid political ideology. Anderson called for the writer's participation in social struggle "because the whole thing, drama and life, is wrapped up in it." Yet when asked if the writer should align himself with a specific political party, Anderson answered that "he should perhaps keep clear." His literary views were most interesting. Hoping for rather than believing in the possibility of proletarian literature in America, Anderson defined this literature broadly as "anything that will make us see that the desire for money and position poisons all life...that the common man and woman defeated by life had in him all the possibilities of life."<sup>40</sup>

This possibility and defeat were the subject of Anderson's memorable fiction before the depression. The crisis of the 1930s did not force a new or foreign literary subject on Anderson; rather, it renewed and deepened his interest in the revealing moments in the inner life of men that often go unrecorded. Anderson's deep interest in humanity did find extra-literary outlets in this decade of intellectual protest. He signed petitions, attended conferences of radical writers, and protested. An example of this protest was Anderson's desire to "stand up and be counted" on the side of Theodore Dreiser, John Dos Passos

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UNIVERSITY MICROFILMS

and the others who spoke out against the "crushing organization of modern society" in Harlan, Kentucky.<sup>41</sup>

In a New Masses symposium entitled "How I Came to Communism," Anderson made it clear that his protest would remain primarily a literary one. Here, in a journal tied to the communist party, Anderson issued a warning to the ideologues and a challenge to the writers:

I believe and am bound to believe that those of you who are revolutionists will get the most help out of men such as myself not by trying to utilize such talents as we have directly as writers of propaganda but in leaving us as free as possible to strike, by our stories out of American life, into the deeper facts.<sup>42</sup>

Thus Anderson continued his pre-depression desire to strike into "the deeper facts." The lives that Anderson sought to probe were now burdened with new economic and social problems, so Anderson, like many others of the decade, felt a need to wander about and renew his exploration of America. The result of this wandering was Puzzled America, a documentary of American lives during the depression. This work questioned the economic facts of the 1930s; Anderson was deeply disturbed by the discrepancy between our potential wealth and the unemployment, hunger and insecurity he saw all around him. Anderson tellingly juxtaposed the rich man's luxury and the poor man's want. Anderson called for a nation of wealth and fulfilled potential where all could live extravagantly. It was not a call for communism--"What is the difference," Anderson asked, "between Stalin of Russia and...the elder Morgan?"--but

rather a challenge to use our native potential. Anderson sought his literary epiphanies now by documenting hunger and economic insecurity. His essential literary aim remained the same, but he felt a need to renew his contact with the American Scene.

Supporting the radical questions, challenges and observations that Anderson made throughout the work were the stories of the people, Anderson's chief interest:

There is too much to tell. On every side of me there are stories. The stories look at me out of the eyes of men and women....Why do I hurry from town to town? America is too vast. There are too many stories to tell.

The political slant "kept thrusting itself in" as Anderson spoke to coal miners, union organizers, and factory women. But beneath the economic concern Anderson sought the epiphany that he had been seeking throughout his career: "I want to see all I can of how people live their lives. This is my business in life--to find out what I can--to go in."<sup>43</sup>

Cowley, Kazin, Wilson and Anderson were not alone in this desire to probe the time with freedom and imagination. The decade's work in fiction, photography, song and art reveals the dual interests in artistic integrity and social concern. As Alfred Kazin points out, "the impact of the crisis upon American writing was obvious from the first, obvious as a headline."<sup>44</sup> Writers turned to the economic and social events of the era for their material. Anderson's Puzzled America is just a part of the enormous

body of work during the decade devoted to direct impressions of the American scene. Travel guides, photo essays, road journals and folklore collections are a few of the art forms employed by a nation "so hungry for news of itself."<sup>45</sup> Artists in all mediums turned directly to the realities before them in order to record what we were so that we might work for needed change. A brief catalogue of titles clearly reveals this direction: My America, Puzzled America, Tragic America, Some American People, America Was Promises, America Now, An American Exodus, The American Earthquake, The Road-In Search of America, An Unsentimental American Journey, The People Talk, The Way Things Are, These Are Our Lives, Talk U. S., USA, You Have Seen Their Faces.<sup>46</sup>

In the attempt to make their art socially responsible, the artists established a healthy communication with the people and events of the era. As Richard Pells pointed out, they discovered not the formula that dogmatic revolutionaries might have hoped for, but "a nation full of variety and paradox, reacting to the crisis in wholly unexpected ways....Thus their journey's were a form of homecoming; they resulted not in a reinforcement of their radical convictions but in a commitment to the land, to the people...and to the entire national experience."<sup>47</sup>

Harold Clurman, leader of the Group Theatre, discovered that this commitment to social significance was indeed widespread. Clurman recorded that he often wandered the streets and was attracted to the low life in his effort

to re-establish himself with the social scene. He visited many burlesque houses for the lurid appeal and taste of rock-bottom reality. In this attempted contact and solidarity with the many victims during the hard winter of 1933, Clurman was surprised by the political content of the burlesque comedians' jokes. The jokes, aside from the rancid ones, focused their raucous humor on the depression experience. An empty pocket, for instance, was called a Hoover dollar.<sup>48</sup> As one historian of the era pointed out, social significance was an obsession everywhere.<sup>49</sup>

The various arts reflected the crisis in imaginative ways. Photographers often juxtaposed official declarations of confidence with the economic suffering of the people. Songsters took proven melodies and fashioned lyrics that pointed to the hard times. Architecture was noted for its simple, economic lines. The theatre movement of the decade offers an excellent example of the balance between concern and craft that we are exploring as a significant stance of the 1930s intellectual community. The American drama of the 1920s was characterized by the rise of expressionism, the growing concern with psychology, and studies of the alienated hero. The drama of the 1930s made use of the modernistic advances, but, in general, it applied them to more obvious social themes. In a decade concerned with collectivism, the 1930s boasted a number of theatrical groups: Theatre Union, Group Theatre, Federal Theatre Project, Mercury Theatre, Theatre of Action,

Theatre Collective, Artef, the Labor Stage, Playwright's company, Worker's Theatre, Worker's Laboratory Theatre, Negro People's Theatre, Rebel Players, and Solidarity Players' Theatre. At the far left the drama took the form of "agit-prop" plays, bare agitation and propaganda. This drama was often little more than stark formula and rhythmic chanting. The sparse dialogue was sharp and declarative and characters were often one-dimensional class-stereotypes. A member of the Worker's Laboratory Theatre speaking of this form of drama said that

traveling groups may be evolved, ready one day to go to strike meetings to cheer up the strikers, just as ready another day to accompany a demonstration to inspire the workers; it must be a theatre where the worker may be inspired to fight for his liberation; a theatre of the class struggle--a theatre of the workers, by the workers, for the workers.<sup>50</sup>

But this fast moving, simple, bare, direct agit-prop drama received little notice outside the union hall. It took a more mature approach to theatre to produce lasting and influential work. One of the most important, influential, and successful theatres of the decade was the Group Theatre. The Group's production often had the immediacy of agit-prop drama but they were also characterized by their artistry. The Group supported a permanent acting company of from twenty to thirty for a ten year period. It produced the first efforts of William Saroyan and Sidney Kingsley while offering works by such established writers as John Howard Lawson and Maxwell Anderson. Its playwriting contest "discovered" Tennessee Williams. The talent within



the Group itself was remarkable: Lee Strasberg, Cheryl Crawford, Elia Kazan, Lee J. Cobb, Franchet Tone, John Garfield, Harold Clurman and Clifford Odets were among the members. Cultural historian Richard Pells remarks that "alone among the various dramatic experiments of the period, the Group managed to function throughout the entire decade... and achieved a level of success that was at once political, commercial, and artistic."<sup>51</sup>

Harold Clurman, a leader of the Group, has documented its story because he saw it as a reflection and image of the life of the thirties.<sup>52</sup> Clurman remembered the 1920s as an age of booze, parties, pleasure and money. He felt that "it was a time of boisterous individualism. Everything and everyone whizzed by on an isolated, trackless course." His mind was left dissatisfied with the theatre of the 20s; he was upset with the theatre for the real world seemed absent. All the energy and curiosity of the decade seemed to lack meaningful direction. Clurman became "sick of this dervish dance they've got us doing on steel springs and a General Electric motor....We must help one another find our common ground...for life, though it be individual to the end, cannot be lived except in terms of people together, sure and strong in their togetherness." The theatre, Clurman said, offered a unique possibility for this social cohesiveness, for its very basis was social contact. But the theatre of the 20s, he believed, had not achieved its social potential. The new technical methods developed

during the decade were exciting but they had minor value unless they were related to a content that was humanly valuable. Clurman wanted a theatre brilliant in both artistic excitement and social content.

During the 1930s, then, Clurman helped forge in the Group both an interest in craft and a concern with the life of the times: "The whole bent of our theatre," Clurman said, "would be to combine a study of theatre craft with a creative content which that craft was to express. To put it another way, our interest in the life of our times must lead us to the discovery of those methods that would most truly convey this life through the theatre." Despite increasing politicalization among the actors during the decade, Clurman refused to allow the Group to become narrow or dogmatic. He told the more militant actors of the group that this theatre was to be a creative American theatre, not a narrow political theatre. Their plays explored the social scene and attacked the deficiencies of the capitalist system but did not point to specific political solutions. Clurman said, "I particularly seemed to resist being swept into any final conclusions....I am a little suspicious of ideas that the mind borrows before blood or experience have made them part of us."

Clurman wanted the Group to make use of the widest and deepest traditions in the theatre. He said that the Group believed "in a varied rich theatre that neglects nothing in the unmeasurable gamut of human experience

and imagination." Clurman's Fervent Years is a fascinating documentation of the Group's disputes, struggles, shortcomings, and temporary collapses; but above all it is a record of a decade of integrity and brilliant theatre combining social protest and art. Clurman said that his attitude toward art and social message was defined by D. H. Lawrence who said: "The essential function of art is moral. But, a passionate implicit morality, not didactic. A morality which changes the blood rather than the mind... changes the blood first. The mind follows later, in the wake."<sup>53</sup>

Clurman, like Cowley, Kazin, Wilson, and Anderson, sought to integrate social concern and artistic craft. This integration, then, is to be found in a significant segment of the intellectual community of the 1930s. Individual writers and critics began to question the social discrepancies of the American scene without neglecting their aesthetic concerns. The decade's fiction is part of an important and imaginative re-evaluation of our national experience. The Partisan Review and its circle will be shown to epitomize this stance of radical social vision and aesthetic concern. But because of the extremity of the social crisis, there was a small but vociferous group of writers and critics that disregarded craft and sought in literature only militant social message.

### CHAPTER III: "ARTISTS IN UNIFORM": THE NEW MASSES

Facts are the new poetry. The proletarian writer will cut away from the stale plots, love stories, ecstasies and verbal heroisms of the fictionists of the past. He will work with facts....He will not worry too much about form. Facts create their own new form....Utility, propaganda, will create a beauty of form in the proletarian poems, plays, and novels of the future. In Soviet Russia this is already true.

Mike Gold in the New Masses

This whole business of style is classroom nonsense..  
..Technique has made cowards of us all. There is no  
'style'--there is only clarity, force, truth in writing.

Mike Gold in the New Masses

There is no sense in pursuing a literary career under the impression that one is operating a bombing plane  
....When you relax the aesthetic...standards, you abandon the discipline itself of your craft.

Edmund Wilson

Harold Clurman in The Fervent Years, recalled a symposium sponsored by the militant John Reed Club in the early 1930s entitled "Revolution and the Theatre." He was invited by the more militantly radical wing of the New York intellectual community because they saw definite "progressive tendencies" in the Group Theatre. Clurman spoke at the symposium on the thematic content of plays in a period of social crisis; his main idea was that a play didn't have to blatantly advertise an obvious social theme in order to have social significance. He believed that this idea was important to stress so that significant work would not be overlooked because of its subtlety. Clurman was met with sarcasm and derision. Everyone at the symposium wanted the floor immediately to attack him and it was during this verbal onslaught that he first heard the slogan "the theatre is a weapon." Clurman said "it was my first lesson in the temper of the thirties."<sup>1</sup>

A center for this militancy, sloganizing, and critical anger was the New Masses magazine. The New Masses nominally professed to carry the traditions of the Masses magazine. Indeed the list of editors, contributors and board members of its first issue (May, 1926) was exciting in its diversity and talent: Joseph Freeman, Mike Gold, John Dos Passos, Sherwood Anderson, Floyd Dell, Max Eastman, John Howard Lawson, Claude McKay, Lewis Mumford, Eugene O'Neill, Elmer Rice, Carl Sandburg, Edmund Wilson, Upton Sinclair, Babette Deutsch, Robinson Jeffers, William Carlos

Williams, and Scott Nearing were all involved. The first editorial pointed to the experimental nature of the new magazine and called for readers' suggestions as to direction and format. This liberalism was also reflected in its contents, a wide mixture of poetry, art work, and reportage.<sup>2</sup>

This initial issue sold out on the stands and the second issue contained many letters from readers delighted by the first issue, praising its originality, diversity and power. The most significant entry in this second issue was an exchange between John Dos Passos and Mike Gold concerning the future direction of the New Masses. Dos Passos' article was a response to name calling by Gold; Gold had called Dos Passos a "bourgeois intellectual" and Dos Passos used the New Masses as a forum for a good-natured yet serious reply. Speaking of "The New Masses I'd Like," Dos Passos called for a "highly flexible" magazine, free from the "phrases, badges, opinions, banners, imported from Russia or anywhere else." Dos Passos felt that foreign systems were a curse and that clear-sightedness was very important for the health of the new magazine. He called for rigorous exploration of new ideas rather than the adoption of an existing creed. Desiring a magazine full of "introspection and doubt," Dos Passos hoped the New Masses would "find what it's not looking for."<sup>3</sup>

Mike Gold answered Dos Passos in the same issue with the reply "Let It Be Really New!" Gold initially seemed to agree with Dos Passos and he too spoke of exploration. But

he soon became dogmatic. In a characteristic attitude he exclaimed, "let us forget the past" and said that Shakespeare, Dante, Shelley and Shaw were of no use to the new writer. He saw a narrow path ahead for the new writers of America, for their sole "choice" was revolt. This revolt, Gold insisted, should not be the blind, directionless revolt suggested by Dos Passos. Gold turned from an attack on Dos Passos to a rigid denial of many of his contemporaries. Always a master of invective, Gold dismissed O'Neill's "queer mystic universe," Waldo Frank's "parlor Zionism," Sherwood Anderson's "mumbling prayers before the ancient phallic gods," Carl Sandburg's "sentimental nationalism," and Floyd Dell's "bed-room romances." Gold called for a renunciation of despair, futility, mysticism, fatalism, and romance. He asked all new writers to explore the world of revolutionary labor; this new subject area would be, Gold assured, a poetic, unsentimental, courageous and hopeful world to write about. Gold, like Dos Passos, wanted the new magazine to be an exploration, but Gold wanted "a conscious exploration--with a compass."<sup>4</sup>

Gold's direction was clear from the first and he soon gained control of the New Masses, steering it in a rigid direction. He took over the magazine in 1928 and it became increasingly sectarian, dogmatically attacking all authors, works and movements that did not fit a narrowly conceived ideal formula. The magazine also became tightly tied to the communist party; this led to a manipulative

relationship, with the party using the New Masses to support its current domestic and foreign political programs. By the mid-1930s, the magazine was far from the tradition of its namesake. An indication of some writers' response to this rigid sectarianism can be found within the New Masses itself in its "Author's Field Day," a symposium that invited authors to respond to the magazine's criticism of their work.

The responses revealed a widespread disagreement with the literary vision of the New Masses. Erskine Caldwell called the literary criticism appearing in the New Masses "soap-suds"; he felt that the clear-cut Marxist bias brought to a piece of literature only added "hot air and lather." Edward Dahlberg singled out Granville Hicks, an important critic in the career of the New Masses, for his inability to make any literary distinctions other than political ones. Dahlberg accused Hicks of disliking the delicate nuances and colors of good writing and of attempting to "annihilate several centuries of sensibilities and start anew." Dahlberg felt that the New Masses critics were vivisectionists and internes, using poems and novels as cadavers. James Farrell called for the New Masses to free itself from the vice of revolutionary snobbery. Farrell felt that the New Masses critics were concentrating solely on the author's class allegiance and revolutionary intentions. Henry Hart warned the magazine against the laziness of blanket diagnosis. Believing that writers were in real need of high standards and help in mastering their craft, Myra Page argued that



New Masses critics were giving out too little of the "real stuff." Josephine Herbst felt that criticism should broaden the base of creative writing, not narrow it; she said that a general flaw of the magazine's criticism was its "niggardly and patronizing" attitudes. She called for a return to a robust enjoyment of writing. Lauren Gilfillan found only slight help in New Masses criticism because of its "one-sided understanding."

Examples of this one-sidedness abound. In contrast to the independent intellectuals who remained concerned with craft as well as message, the New Masses circle rejected the art of the past and most of the present while seeking to promote a kind of formula fiction that would present a specific political ideal. The New Masses, while taking the name of Bohemia's most well-known journal, disassociated itself from the less militant and more varied radicalism of the Village. A review of Floyd Dell's Love In Greenwich Village in an early issue of New Masses provided the forum for an attack on Greenwich Village radicalism; this radicalism, the reviewer pointed out, was too concerned with love and sex and too ignorant of economic conditions. These early radicals were "deceived by the erotic revolt"; sex rebellion had usurped social revolution. This earlier Bohemian emphasis on new forms of love and poetry, the New Masses believed, must be replaced by a greater awareness of social and economic events.<sup>6</sup>

The writers of the 1920s fared little better than their Village predecessors in the pages of the New Masses. Mike Gold typically led the assault on the writers of the 20s; he viewed this generation as a floundering one, rotting in sexual abuse, entering curious cults, flinging themselves into the abyss of mysticism. This generation, according to Gold, believed in nothing but the empirical sensation. Their achievements in technique and craft were overlooked or, when noted, were considered of little consequence in the face of their inability to affirm a positive revolutionary vision.<sup>7</sup>

Gold often singled out individual writers of the 20s generation, and Hemingway received a great deal of abuse. Gold saw Hemingway's popularity as a fad, promoted by a cult of bored upper-class Americans curious about the "amours and drinking bouts of Americans with incomes who rot in European cafes." Only those Americans without goals or vision turned to Hemingway and his portraits of self-pitying exiles. Hemingway expressed the mood of irony, lazy despair, and old-world sophistication, and the American public, "shot to pieces morally and intellectually," responded to this portrayal. Gold said that Hemingway, Anderson, and "all the bourgeois modern American writers," write for and express the soul of the white collar class. Gold attacked this literature as a form of escape and attacked the audience as directionless and decadent. He acknowledged Hemingway's power, but felt it was a pity that Hemingway "is not the

herald of a new way of feeling, but the last voice of a decade of despair."<sup>8</sup>

This form of sectarian attack in the pages of the New Masses was leveled at many of the key artists of the time. Wallace Stevens, a brilliant poet respected and promoted by the Partisan Review and its circle, was often chided in the pages of the New Masses for his lack of commitment. While acknowledging that Stevens was "an incomparable verbal musician," Stanley Burnshaw, critic and poet of the New Masses, pointed out that nobody had stopped to ask Stevens if he had any ideas. Stevens could be read for pure sensation, but Burnshaw said that if any message was there "it was carefully buried and would take no end of labor to exhume." It was Burnshaw's conviction that this pure sense poetry could be read for its brightness, humor and phrases that roll on the tongue; but certainly anyone concerned with the events of the world could hardly take it in more than tiny doses.<sup>9</sup>

Isidor Schneider, also an editor of the New Masses, joined Burnshaw in pointing to Stevens' alleged lack of ideas. Schneider too recognized the great craftsmanship, but felt that Stevens would pay the price for over-concern with craftsmanship, for "the deeper pleasures of poetry are those excited by significant content." In Stevens' poetry Schneider saw much sparkle but little fire.<sup>10</sup> Stevens was upset by Burnshaw's harsh treatment and wrote: "I hope I am headed left, but there are lefts and lefts, and certainly

I am not headed for the ghastly left of the New Masses." Stevens later satirized Burnshaw in his poem "Mr. Burnshaw and the Statue."<sup>11</sup>

Burnshaw was not content to anger Stevens; he took on the most respected poet of the era, T. S. Eliot. Burnshaw wrote the poem "Mr Tubbe's Morning Service," a satirical "homage" to Eliot that appeared in the New Masses. Burnshaw portrayed Eliot as Mr. Waldo Tubbe, leader of a cult "well insulated with despair." This ancient sage fed his followers a diet of "fused Hindu-Latin-Chinese-Greek" and other "gibberish concocted in the learned school." This was a poetry of "scholastic morgues" and "sweet inner masochisms"; it provided all with blinders to protect them from current events. The many junior Tubbes worshiped this "drool" and snubbed the real world of revolutionary masses.<sup>12</sup>

Burnshaw's frequent attacks on modern poetry from the pages of New Masses drew the response of Harriet Monroe, founder and editor of Poetry, who was dedicated to promoting new artistic experiments in verse. Monroe said that all art had a message and, in this wide sense, all poetry was propaganda. But this message might be of a new color scheme or a new rhythmic pattern that excited the poet. What was necessary, Monroe believed, was that this message be profoundly at the center of the work, organically integrated into the whole. This message could not be hammered in by the poet; it must come, Monroe said, from the spirit, not the will. Thus the message is "elusive, intangible and

free, not to be directed or confined." So she argued vigorously with Burnshaw for she felt he was attempting to bury all poets who were not idealizing the Russian system.<sup>13</sup>

Monroe was joined by Ezra Pound, another seminal figure in modern poetry, in this counter-attack on the New Masses hostility toward modern poetry. Pound's first letter to the New Masses was one of praise; Pound found the new magazine to be very engaging and, reading its first issues from exile in Europe, he said he felt like returning to America for the first time in years. The variety and excitement of the early New Masses had awakened his curiosity. A year and a half later Pound wrote again to the magazine, warning it of the danger of Soviet bureaucracy. Pound must have felt that the New Masses had not heeded his warning, for two years later he wrote directly to Mike Gold attacking the slave mentality of the magazine, its idea that Marx was omniscient, its belief that "a communist membership card confers literary genius on its holder," and its tyranny of cliché and phrase. Gold replied by suggesting that Pound study Marx, a recommendation that Gold made frequently.<sup>14</sup>

Few of the giants of modern fiction were safe in the pages of the New Masses. In a review that came dangerously close to self-parody the magazine argued that Proust would probably not be read after the revolution; for the present, it was argued that Proust and other bourgeois novelists should not be read, for the time would be better spent with Marx. At the same time when William Phillips, editor of

the Partisan Review, was praising Joyce for his psychological realism, the New Masses was attacking Joyce as a leading representative of the decadent bourgeois; Joyce, Proust, and Henry James were linked as "ultra-psychologisers" who were running from reality.<sup>15</sup>

The narrowness of the New Masses was not confined to letters. While the art column of the Partisan Review was promoting the many artistic experiments of the century the New Masses was attacking all forms of modernism. Typical of this rigidity was the article on Dali which focused on the escape from reality in his work. The reviewer could not understand why Dali did not depict the class struggle. The reviewer saw no relevance in Dali's work; Dali, the reviewer insisted, should have painted the struggles of French workers against imperialism and the suppression of the worker's revolt in Spain.<sup>16</sup>

The key independent figures of the 1930s whose emphasis on both art and social vision was surveyed in the last chapter, did not escape the New Masses invective. Edmund Wilson was often singled out for his alleged aloofness. Wilson was called "a fugitive from action" despite his frequent literary and extra-literary protest activities. What the magazine most objected to in Wilson was his "intellectual bias." Mike Gold admitted that Wilson was a solid critic and a creative artist, but he felt that Wilson needed to read more Marx.<sup>17</sup>

Despite the obvious pleasure New Masses critics derived from name calling in the cultural field, their attention was increasingly drawn from an attack on past and present art to the international events of the 1930s. The magazine shifted its focus from sectarianism and invective in the literary field to a defense of the Soviet Union against rising fascism. After only two years of publication the lead editorial announced a new management and a policy change. Mike Gold had assumed control and the magazine promised "less literature and more life." The magazine attempted to become a journal of the workers' life and art. The new policy of making the New Masses a non-literary and non-intellectual magazine changed its content from literary concerns to documentary reportage and finally almost exclusively to international affairs. The name writers disappeared; the magazine continued to possess historical, political, and sociological interest, but its literary contributions faded. As the change became obvious, as reports on strikes at Gastonia and Elizabethtown replaced literary criticism, Floyd Dell resigned in protest. Mike Gold's reply was an angry one. Gold insisted that Dell was never a real revolutionist but merely a Village playboy; Dell's interests were centered not in the reality of the class struggle, but rather in the smooth curves of the female anatomy. Let Dell and the rest continue their literary discussions around tea-tables, Gold declared, for the New Masses would present the strong smells and sounds of radicalism.<sup>18</sup>

In September of 1933 the New Masses editorial announced its change from a monthly to a weekly. The editorial said this change was forced upon the magazine by swift moving current events. In order to report and interpret the vital news the magazine would become a weekly, meeting the demand for a revolutionary interpretation of the news, attempting to cover the entire American scene, its economics, politics and art.<sup>19</sup> Soon the magazine became involved primarily in politics. Because of its close ties to the Soviet Union, its career in the later 1930s was a difficult one centered mainly in the defense of Stalinism. The task left little time for literature.

But before its change to a news weekly, the New Masses, as we have seen, epitomized the dogmatism, sectarianism and critical negation in literature that was opposed by so many other radicals of the era. One of the New Masses' own reporters objected to the magazine's lack of emphasis on artistic form and its denial of cultural heritage. While realizing that the New Masses was dedicated to a revolutionary art, this contributor spoke out against the childish nihilism and blind rejection of past art. Revolution need not mean wholesale rejection and negation of past artists and movements; rather, this reporter stressed, revolutionary art could be affirmative, gathering and utilizing the best of past traditions.<sup>20</sup>

Although often overshadowed by its denials, the New Masses did affirm a particular kind of literature. The



magazine consistently called for literature rigidly tied to revolutionary theory. This formula appeared explicitly as directives to writers and implicitly in reviews attacking deviations in the diverse imaginative fiction of the period.

This formula was often articulated in the magazine by critic Edwin Seaver who warned that the revolutionary writer could not depart from a clearly defined line of action without risking attack. This line, Seaver explained, was the application of the materialistic dialectic to all aspects of fiction. That is, the writer of fiction was required to depict the evolutionary development of history; this vision saw history as a series of conflicts with the present era characterized by a struggle between the property-tied class and the class-conscious workers. Such a vision, Seaver insisted, demanded not only that the writer see things as they are, but also where things are going. The writer must "take a conscious part in leading the reader through the maze of history toward Socialism and the classless society."<sup>21</sup> Thus the writer was required not only to educate his reader to the abuses of the present system, which many writers of the decade were willing to do, but also to convince the reader that the answer to these abuses was, inevitably, the joyous worker's state.

This formula was the subject of debate throughout the early years of the decade, with the more independent writers extending its boundaries in critical theories but disregarding its rigidity in practice. But the New Masses

critics held to the narrow formula and to all of its implications. Mike Gold said that literature must reflect the struggle of the workers in their fight for world domination. This struggle must be portrayed "with a clear revolutionary point; otherwise it is meaningless." Fiction, Gold said, must depict the life and struggle of the workers with a "revolutionary elan." The old decay and despair were passing, Gold insisted; the revolutionary workers were a conscious, hopeful and victorious force.<sup>22</sup>

Since the New Masses core believed that the workers were to be depicted in all their vigor, enthusiasm, awareness and victory, they were often forced to correct those that chose to document the bewilderment and despair of the era. Granville Hicks lashed out at "Those Who Quibble, Bicker, Nag, and Deny." Hicks pointed out that communism was hope and good news; its purpose was to bring clarity and strength to a writer's vision. Hicks was aware that it was much harder to express the communist conviction of the triumph of the working class than to communicate a mood of disgust and despair. He granted that to be militantly affirmative often led to slogan endings and formula stories. But he nonetheless called for an end to the defeatism present in so much of the fiction and a turn to the hope of the communist vision.<sup>23</sup> The New Masses critics wanted the writers to go beyond their realistic portrayal of the economic collapse of the system to a depiction of an immanent communist solution to this collapse.

One historian of the era found that this formula, if practiced, would have led to "a Horatio Alger story gone astray." There would have been a depiction of a virtuous, struggling worker and his growing class consciousness. The boss would have been depicted as a one-sided capitalist exploiter. The worker would have moved in a straight line, organizing the factory, leading a successful strike, and, with clenched fists, marching off with the workers to the dawn of a classless society at the novel's end.<sup>24</sup> Many writers refused to write this kind of fiction.

The intellectuals of the era did not, on the whole, relinquish their integrity. Thus the more rigid minority was forced to limit their critical praise, denounce deviations, and instruct the writers on their proper practice. Malcolm Cowley, realizing that the New Masses had been instructed by the communist party to guide every phase of the writers work, was somewhat amused when he was called in to receive criticism about his article on a hunger march. The party critics concluded that Cowley's article failed to emphasize the communist party's leadership in the struggle for bread, did not sufficiently suggest the growing militancy of the masses, did not explain that the actions of the police were directed by a capitalist conspiracy, and "finally that it revealed my petit-bourgeois illusions and my insufficient grounding in the Marxian dialectic."<sup>25</sup>

Albert Halper met with similar experiences during the decade. Halper was the author of several novels during

the 30s depicting the alienation of labor and the brutality at the factory. But this was not enough for some; Mike Gold reviewed Halper's best known novel, Union Square, in the New Masses and attacked those critics who praised the novel for its realistic depiction of the worker. Gold felt that the novel's success was a sham, for Union Square did not depict the communist movement in New York but rather was a picture of the author and his "shabby-minded friends" who drifted in and out of the revolution. Ultimately, Gold said that the novel was an anti-revolutionary book, an imitation proletarian novel written to attract the attention of prestigious critics rather than to educate the masses.<sup>26</sup>

Halper has since written his memoir of the thirties and its vivid scenes often contrast his own independence with communist rigidity. Halper's working class background and writing ability attracted immediate party attention when he arrived in New York City in the early 1930s. He was taken to view agit-prop drama with its empty bombast, formula, and cliché. Halper recalled, "My first impression, which was to remain with me permanently, exploded inside me. These people, they'll never create a revolution."

Later that evening Halper was taken to party headquarters and asked to write agit-prop drama himself. Halper asked for details and he was given a specific plot: he was to write a play where one worker convinces other workers in an arms plant to refuse to send supplies "to Chiang Kai-Shek's imperialistic counter-revolutionary

regime in China. It should end with the workers shouting 'All power to Mao and the Eighth Route Army!'" Halper left with no desire to contribute material to the party "machine."

Halper maintained this independence when he was interviewed by the editor of a magazine. The editor tried to force Halper into a category but Halper was insistent: "I write about people. I don't know any masses. I write only about people I know, friends, enemies, my relatives. That's not the masses. I don't know that many." When asked about proletarian writing, Halper replied that he didn't know what that term meant. The editor left without the neat scheme and order he had been seeking; Halper did not lend himself or his fiction to confining categories.<sup>27</sup>

This schematic order sought by rigid party advocates was difficult to find outside of official policy and decree. The New Masses was even forced into the embarrassing position of refuting its own material. Meridel Leseur contributed brilliant writing to many journals during the 30s and her reportage is often found in anthologies of the era. She wrote an article on "Women on the Breadlines" for the New Masses in which she graphically depicted the fear, humiliation and despair in the faces of women at an unemployment bureau. Much like Isaac Soyev's painting "Employment Agency," Leseur's article was a painfully close study of the individual victims of hunger, unemployment, and bureaucratic insensitivity. She did not see revolutionary solidarity here; rather, the women "look away from each other. We look

at the floor. It's too terrible to see this animal terror in each other's eyes." She individualized the women: Bernice, the large Polish domestic, now unemployed and lonely, with her innate openness changing to distrust and her dream of her own home crumbling; the woman Ellen who finally exploded with rage; Mrs. Grey, scarred with labor and full of bitterness over the death of three children. Leseur depicted a jungle full of beaten, entrapped victims and "there is no way out."

Although it was a definite indictment of the system, this article was attacked by the New Masses for it failed to picture the revolutionary spirit and direction that the magazine was trying to stress. The editors acknowledged that the writing was able and informative, but they deplored its "defeatist attitude" and were quick to point out that "there is a place for the unemployed woman, as well as man, in the ranks of the unemployed councils and all branches of the organized revolutionary movement. Fight for your class...join the communist party."<sup>28</sup> To the credit of most writers of the era, their distaste for capitalism, their sense of crisis, and their commitment to a close scrutiny of the American scene led to realistic depictions of the decade rather than shrill calls to join a particular party.

All in all, the literature of the era did not suffer from ideology to the extent which is usually assumed. We need only to examine characteristic examples of the fiction to see its essential freedom from formula. In Bottom Dogs,

Edward Dahlberg wrote the story of Lorry Lewis, one of the army of dispossessed during the hard times. Lorry's early story is also Dahlberg's story: childhood in an orphanage was followed by years of drifting from Cleveland to Kansas City to the West Coast. This undirected, chaotic movement took Lorry-Dahlberg to the YMCAs, stockyards, dancehalls, railroad yards, alleys, and whorehouses of America. Dahlberg followed this drifting with a university education and a highly successful writing career. Lorry's life, however, never took such conscious direction.

In the final chapter of Bottom Dogs Lorry wanders into Solomon's Danceplace, a cheap gathering spot with glaring electric lights, fast cuties and jazz. Lorry is there to kill time; after years of kicking around he is pale, sick, shaky and insecure. He is hoping to pick up a woman who is lonely enough to go with him. After many failures he finds a woman with the fever; the jazz rhythms, bare lights, fast foxtrots, and made-up men and women help to create a nightmarish aspect to this finale. Lorry and the woman leave the dancehall and in her cheap room Lorry takes her without warmth or emotion. Walking home to the Y he sees the bleak winter leaves; they appear sick and foreboding. Lorry takes this as a sign that he might have caught a disease from the woman. Perhaps that would be best, he thinks, "for some kind of hospital calamity might push him out of the monotonous dead level he had been in for months." Lorry thinks of some sort of escape. Perhaps he could go

east, but he really wants no more of roaming, sleeping in coal cars and strange ghostly hotel rooms. Perhaps travel of some sort would be the answer, perhaps sickness, "something had to happen; and he knew nothing would."<sup>29</sup>

There is certainly no "revolutionary elan" here, no precise revolutionary direction; rather there is the chilling vision of a sick, cold world. Lorry certainly was exposed to the experiences necessary to formulate a radical vision of American society, but he never saw beyond his own bewilderment. At the conclusion of the book he is not moving toward militant action; he is at a dead end. Dahlberg revealed in the preface to Bottom Dogs that immediately upon finishing the novel he felt so sick he required hospitalization. "The real malady," Dahlberg wrote, "was Bottom Dogs." Dahlberg had written a savage and loveless book and regreted that he could not have written a warm, human book. D. H. Lawrence wrote to Dahlberg about Bottom Dogs and called it "a genuine book...even if it is an objectionable one." Lawrence saw that the characters function with a minimum of consciousness. They were all reduced to the brutal condition of simple persistence and survival. There was no revolutionary solidarity here; people found each other repulsive and avoided human contact. This world revealed the underside of the American Dream where one could see the many failures necessary to build up the few successes. Lawrence praised the book for its sheer bottom-dog style, its bare barking language. "I do not want to read any more books



like this," Lawrence wrote, "but I am glad to have read this one.....It helps one to understand the world."<sup>30</sup>

Edmund Wilson also noted the book's relevance to our world. He felt that the book's depiction of our back streets was very close to us, perhaps too close. Wilson recognized that Dahlberg was able to take the rawest, cheapest, and most commonplace American material and transform it, through craft and medium, into "a work of distinction."<sup>31</sup> The New Masses was, characteristically, more restrained in its response to Dahlberg's work. Noting in particular Dahlberg's "scattered, broken, and bewildered" characters, the New Masses said Dahlberg had not yet written a true proletarian novel. His characters and material were the clay from which revolutionary fiction was to be built, but the future work must stress revolutionary change and teaching.<sup>32</sup>

The New Masses was hard to please. Even Robert Cantwell's Land of Plenty, the novel that has been called the decade's best strike novel, the decade's best novel of factory life, and one of the era's strongest fictional expressions, failed to satisfy the magazine; they saw only the book's failure to forecast a clear communist victory. Malcolm Cowley remembered Robert Cantwell as a hungry and brilliant man frantically studying both Marx and Henry James; Cantwell was constantly full of excitement which he managed to share with others as he discussed strike strategy or sensibility in fiction.<sup>34</sup> Cantwell grew up in Washington state and worked there in a plywood factory and this experience became

the material for Land of Plenty. He followed this novel with a successful career as editor and writer. He helped launch the revival of interest in Henry James through his articles in the New Republic, and also wrote a study of Hawthorne. In both these studies Cantwell stressed the social relevance of James and Hawthorne.

Cantwell's novel is a noteworthy one for many reasons, although it did not depict the future classless society that the communists would have. It was a prophetic novel in its depiction of the worker's takeover of the plywood veneer plant, a strike tactic that would become prominent later in the decade. It is also memorable for its characters, its plot complexity and excitement, and its strongly depicted setting. The characters were not the stereotypes they might have become in a more dogmatic novel. They are diverse and well realized. The workers are not all virtuous and heroic. There is Morley who craves recognition from the bosses. There is Walt, the disdainful college boy who seeks little more from the factory than a paycheck and a chance to score with one of the factory girls. There is Winters who goes through the strike thinking not about militancy and victory but about his sick wife at home. The bosses are not blatantly evil men. They are shown at their homes with the multiple pressures to get ahead. They too are fearful of the men above them; they are as much victims of the system as the workers. In the factory setting the bosses are shown to be not tyrants but rather inept and weak men suspicious of the men below and above them.

The story revolves around the education of Johnny Hagen. In a tickly layered plot, Johnny awakens to the realities of a strike and sexual initiation during the climatic take over of the factory. The strike does not bring immediate ideological revelation to Johnny. After the initial excitement and sweet sense of power, he is again beset by doubts and complexities that simple formulas can't answer. Newspaper distortions, the misunderstanding of friends and family, and disagreements among the workers all plague the strikers until a final night of violence and police repression when the takeover is broken. During the chaos Johnny and a factory woman manage to sweeten the defeat momentarily through lovemaking, but the warmth is short-lived. The book ends in confusion with Johnny hiding in the bushes near the factory wondering what to do. The workers have been driven from the factory and Johnny can only cry and wait for darkness.

While the New Masses scorned the irresolution of Cantwell's ending, the review in the Partisan Review praised Land of Plenty for its realism. Jack Conroy reviewed Cantwell's novel and said he immediately recognized Cantwell's factory. He could smell it and feel the itch of sawdust and sweat. The unromanticized characters too were easily recognized; they "stick in the mind like a cocklebur." Conroy, himself a noteworthy proletarian novelist, called Land of Plenty a "standard" for proletariat writers.<sup>35</sup>

The inability of the New Masses to honestly respond to the decade's fiction was further complicated by its direct ties to Soviet policy. As the magazine shifted its focus from literature to politics, it became increasingly interested in the Soviet Union. As early as November of 1926 the magazine devoted extensive coverage to the U.S.S.R. In that issue which celebrated the ninth anniversary of the Russian Revolution, Mike Gold declared that "as long as the Red Flag waves over the Kremlin, there is hope in the world." He compared the Soviet Union to Pericles' Athens and Shakespeare's England. The editorial praised the "red youthful giant," the "great artist-nation," and centered all its hopes on the ability of the Soviet Union to march from the tragic present to the glorious future. Finally, the magazine declared its allegiance to the U.S.S.R.: "Our deepest hopes are centered in you, our right arms are yours to command, our life is your life."<sup>36</sup>

At the time of the fifteenth anniversary of the U.S.S.R., the New Masses devoted the entire issue to celebration. Coinciding with this celebration the New Masses ran a subscription contest with a trip to the Soviet Union as top prize.<sup>37</sup> Many years later, Granville Hicks was to write that during the years he was connected with the New Masses there was always someone on the board of the magazine working directly with the communist party. Through this person the party exerted its influence when it desired. Hicks said that "within the general framework of the party

line, the magazine had a certain amount of leeway, but the ninth floor [party headquarters] always could crack the whip and frequently did."<sup>38</sup>

The magazine came under direct party control as the result of the Second World Conference of the International Union of Revolutionary Writers held in Kharkov, the capital of the Socialist Soviet Republic of the Ukraine, in November of 1930. The New Masses sent a delegation to this communist conference and the delegation was given specific directives designed to shape the magazine into a journal obedient to Soviet needs. From this point on it might be said that Soviet political policy shaped the magazine, not the realities of the American scene.<sup>39</sup>

The initial report on this conference appeared in the February, 1931 issue of New Masses. It explained that the revolutionary writers and artists from twenty-two countries had met to discuss their problems and tasks and to adopt a common international platform and a specific program for each country. Noting that the conference was responding to the new sense of crisis and higher ideological level since the first conference (held in 1927), the New Masses reported that this conference was not the loose discussion of artistic problems that characterized the earlier meeting. Here a specific concrete political platform was adopted. The key issue in this new platform was the defense of the Soviet Union by all workers and revolutionary intellectuals. The entire conference, it was

reported, pivoted around "the necessity of organizing the defense of the Soviet Union."

In addition to this main task, the platform for the American delegation--Mike Gold, Fred Ellis, William Gropper, Joshua Kunitz and other New Masses editors represented the Americans--was given specific demands that they struggle for the revolutionary labor movement, struggle against white chauvinism, and struggle against "petty-bourgeois tendencies" in art. Along with this political platform, the American delegation was given a "Program of Action" which included extending the base of the New Masses, developing new Negro writers, organizing cultural groups within the U. S., strengthening the theoretical aspects of art, strengthening the New Masses by tying it more directly to the working class and to the international revolutionary movement, and developing agit-prop troupes to perform at workers' gatherings.<sup>40</sup>

A month later the New Masses printed Mike Gold's reaction to the meeting. Typically, Gold was emotional and enthusiastic about the experience. He was filled with joy at being able to see the revolution first hand. He was impressed by the parades, the singing, and the revolutionary solidarity that he found. At the Congress he saw a level of cooperation among artists that he had thought impossible: "each of us has not come here with a personal world in his head; we have come here as units in a common world." Gold felt that a new revolutionary consciousness was present that would link all artists in a common cause.<sup>41</sup>

This joy, hope and solidarity were a remarkable contrast to the formal disciplinary resolution that the New Masses received from the IURW a year after the conference at Kharkov. The IURW reviewed the progress of the New Masses toward meeting the demands from the Kharkov conference and sent the magazine a stiff and sharply worded list of thirteen points to consider. The resolution recognized the progress in the magazine: all the important strikes had been reported in the New Masses and the magazine "pursued a much more clearcut political line." However, the IURW found much still to be done by the magazine. The magazine had not yet fulfilled many of the political demands formulated at Kharkov. The New Masses still showed manifestations of "rotten liberalism." The magazine was still paying insufficient attention to progress within the Soviet Union, although coverage was increasing. The magazine was still conducting a poor and unsystematic fight in defense of the U.S.S.R. The continuing literary features of the magazine were not yet sufficiently political. In summary, as the central organ of the IURW in America, the New Masses was found to be insufficient after a year of some progress. The IURW found that "all these mistakes, shortcomings, and lapses are, at bottom, attributable to the great basic weakness of the magazine, to its insufficient politicalization, to the absence of a sufficiently militant line of its whole cultural and political activity." The editorial board of the New Masses met and "enthusiastically approved"

the resolution and accepted the analysis of the IURW. The New Masses rededicated itself to following the dictates of the IURW.<sup>42</sup>

This obedience to foreign dictates by an American journal did not go unnoticed. Malcolm Cowley observed that the program at Kharkov was intended to guide every phase of the American revolutionary writer's work. Cowley saw that this program, imposed on American writers by Russian literary bureaucrats, was "grotesquely unsuited to American life, as it was to our language."<sup>43</sup>

The most outspoken attack on the obedience of the New Masses to foreign dogma was voiced by Max Eastman. Eastman had initially been pleased by the New Masses and its attempted resurrection of the spirit of its Village predecessor. Eastman wrote to the magazine during its first year and said he felt happy about the magazine's first few issues, its humor and its general standard of excellence.<sup>44</sup> But as the magazine grew dogmatic, Eastman grew disenchanted. This disillusionment formed the basis for Eastman's book length critique of growing bigotry and bureaucratism in the literary field.<sup>45</sup> Eastman was aware that his book would be denounced as counter-revolutionary by those who still believed in "Soviet ballyhoo"; but he felt he was still on the side of the proletarian class struggle and that critical truth-speaking was an essential element of that struggle. His book expressed his anger over the events at Kharkov, for he saw this as a systematic effort at bureaucratic



control of all forms of human expression. Eastman believed that art could not be treated as a commodity nor manipulated by a barrage of slogans. Eastman felt that since Lenin's death the Soviet experiment had taken a dangerous reactionary course; one aspect of this course was Stalin's attempted control of creative art.

In art, Eastman said, clear thinking is essential, and he was profoundly troubled by the phrases, slogans, categories, and blanket proposals that were everywhere at the Kharkov conference. He felt that the approval of the New Masses delegation to their rough treatment at the hands of the IURW was a low point in the dignity of the literary mind. He simply could not stand to see political abjection parading as the creation of a new culture. This "kowtowing toward Moscow" by the New Masses group brought a blast from Eastman that must be quoted in full to gain a sense of his anger and disapproval:

These all too proletarian writers, veiling under a fanatic duty toward the Holy Land, a praying eastward, a hasty dipping of the pen at the bidding of any ignorant whippersnapper Stalin appoints to wield the knout over them, the feebleness of their faith in any spontaneous motion of life in their own breasts or their own country, far from building the foundations of an American revolutionary culture, are handing over the creative art of the whole period...to men who know half as much as they do, and care half as much about the future of social life, but who have the inflexible integrity of vision and speech which makes art command attention.<sup>46</sup>

This direct tie to Soviet policy was manifested in various ways within the magazine. The most conspicuous effect occurred during the radical change in communist

policy which began about 1935. The New Masses was forced to alter abruptly its political and literary beliefs; this obvious example of outside manipulation destroyed the magazine's integrity. The communist party before 1935 was in an ultra-left period, a militant and hopeful time when party members were uncompromising in their insistence on world revolution. This earlier militant phase was inspired by the economic collapse of capitalism in America and Europe in the early 30s. The communists believed that this collapse would soon be followed by revolutions in the faltering countries. The only revolution that occurred, however, was in Germany and it was a fascist takeover. The growth of fascism soon forced a change in Soviet needs. Gradually Russia modified her rhetoric. In 1934 she entered the League of Nations and signed a non-aggression pact with France. In 1935 the Seventh World Congress of the Communist International met in Moscow and established an official policy of Popular Front. This was basically a defensive policy; the Soviets sought allies among the nations. Revolutionary vision was jettisoned and the Soviets struggled to maintain the status quo. This defensive posture eventually led to the Nazi-Soviet Pact of 1939 which disillusioned radicals throughout the world and is often regarded as the end of the radical hopes of the 1930s.<sup>47</sup>

As a consequence, the New Masses altered its policy. Politically, the magazine was forced to cease its hostility to the American system and to actually support democracy

and capitalism. In the early 1930s the magazine had been very hostile to the Roosevelt administration. FDR was depicted as the friend of the big businessman. As late as February, 1935, the New Masses was still viciously attacking the democratic administration; a cartoon at this time showed FDR wearing cufflinks with swastikas on them. But by July of 1938 the magazine was printing favorable drawings of FDR, depicting him as a strong, able leader. They were celebrating his birthday and sponsoring "Why I Like America" contests. Communism was being depicted as nothing more than "twentieth century Americanism." Again and again the New Masses informed its readers that it was carrying on the tradition of the American revolution; Earl Browder, leader of the party in America, wrote in the magazine that the party was merely completing "the work begun by Tom Paine, George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and Abraham Lincoln."<sup>48</sup>

This embarrassing change of face was not confined to the political field. Mike Gold's attempt to develop the raw talent of radical worker-writers was undercut by the dictates of the Popular Front; the party now felt that it was expedient to have allies among the liberal writers with prestigious names. The magazine began to court its former enemies. Its literary preferences now became broad, almost indiscriminate. The very terminology was abruptly changed and "proletarian literature" was dropped for "people's literature," the literary analogue of the sweeping political about face.<sup>49</sup> The more independent and discerning

of the radical writers, including the Partisan Review circle, did not rejoice in the magazine's renunciation of its rigid sectarianism. As we shall see in the next chapter, they correctly saw that the New Masses' new critical latitude was the result not of an appreciation of a wide range of radical literature, but of political pressure, manipulation, and expediency.

A most obvious example of this turnabout was the case of Archibald MacLeish. MacLeish was an early victim of the magazine's sweeping attacks on all literature that did not fit a rigidly conceived ideal. Mike Gold attacked MacLeish's "fascist unconscious" and the magazine often used him as the type of the aloof artist. MacLeish was often stung by left-wing critical attack and he spoke out against their hysteria and fanaticism: "Nothing which does not conform to the official dogmas will be endured and any man who questions them...will be strung-up to the nearest lamppost of Marxian invective."<sup>51</sup>

But with the coming of the Popular Front, MacLeish was unstrung. He soon became a regular figure in the New Masses, contributing poems and reviews and strengthening the magazine's attempt to be a representative American democratic journal.<sup>52</sup> Hemingway too was now courted. He was no longer viewed as a member of the 'decadent' twenties generation; he was now a comrade in the fight against fascism.<sup>53</sup> Hemingway contributed two articles to the magazine in the late 30s. Despite his popularity with the New Masses of

the Popular Front period, Hemingway confessed to Joseph North, an editor of the magazine, that he could never be a communist for it was not his style of life and thought. He realized he was too much of an individual to embrace a single system. Furthermore, Hemingway revealed that he could not read Marx for "he could only spoil my style. Pretty soon I'd be saying things like 'surplus value,' 'absolute and relative impoverishment of the proletariat,' and 'dictatorship of the proletariat.'" Hemingway continued to look to the diction of Mark Twain, not the political rhetoric of Marxism.<sup>54</sup>

Despite his individualism, early "decadence," and continuing distrust of Marxist rhetoric, then, Hemingway was nonetheless one of the new allies of the new New Masses. Hemingway was even persuaded to make a rare public speech to address the Second Congress of the League of American Writers on the menace of fascism. The League was itself yet another manifestation of the change in communist policy. The League of American Writers was formed by the party to replace the more militant John Reed Clubs in 1935.<sup>55</sup> The Reed Clubs had been important meeting places for young radical workers and writers dedicated to revolution. Their dissolution and the formation of the more respectable League was characteristic of the Popular Front obsession with wide-spread acceptance and recognition. One former John Reed Club writer remembered vividly this telling policy change. He insisted that the real decision to form a

League of American Writers was made at the headquarters of the American communist party. He was present when a number of Reed Club writers were told that their club no longer existed and henceforth "a broad organization of American writers" would represent the party on the cultural front. He protested that it was not right to disband a useful revolutionary organization without consulting its members. The answer given him was that party decisions must be carried out. Although he was an executive of the Reed Club, his name did not appear in the new League, for the party now was looking for celebrities, not revolutionaries.<sup>56</sup>

The League sponsored a series of Congresses. The first Congress held in 1935 was, on the whole, a serious discussion of the possibilities of radical literature. The writers represented many different approaches to radical art and the papers delivered offer excellent evidence of the artistic integrity and variety of the depression writers. The party had brought together many of the era's best artists; they were socially concerned and serious craftsmen. The call for the first Congress was signed by Nelson Algren, Nathan Asch, Erskine Caldwell, Robert Cantwell, Jack Conroy, Malcolm Cowley, Theodore Dreiser, Edward Dahlberg, James Farrell, Kenneth Fearing, Josephine Herbst, Langston Hughes, Tillie Lerner, Lewis Mumford, John Dos Passos, Nathaniel West, Richard Wright and many more. The conference was attended by over two hundred American writers and four thousand interested observers. Despite the reading of a

call from the IURW for all writers to "sharpen their weapons," the papers delivered at the Congress attest to the determination to avoid narrowness and rigidity on the part of the decade's intellectuals. Many stressed the necessity for a firm mastery of craft. So prominent was the emphasis on craft that by the end of the Congress Mike Gold warned that "the tone of many of our papers...showed that our literary movement in in danger of becoming a petty bourgeois movement." By the time of the Second Congress in 1937 the communist party was firmly in control of its Popular Front policy and the Congress was directed to the needs of the Soviet Union. A concern with the Spanish Civil War and the menace of fascism replaced the concern with revolutionary art as a topic for discussion. Pressing events forced the party to forget about revolutionary culture and to deal with simple survival.<sup>57</sup>

The New Masses ceased to be a real literary journal by the midpoint of the decade. The little fiction that did appear was no longer characterized by shrill, didactic calls to Socialist revolution written by class conscious workers. Now the poems and stories pointed to the menace of fascism. The attempt to create a true literary journal of revolutionary worker's art had failed.

As a final section of this chapter on sectarianism in the 30s, it would be instructive to look briefly at the careers of Mike Gold and Granville Hicks, for they are the two New Masses critics most closely identified with the

rigidity and dogmatism that arose during the decade. They directed the New Masses in the pre-Popular Front period when its narrow voice was a sharp contrast to the Partisan Review, which attempted to maintain high artistic standards while dealing with the social crisis.

Mike Gold was constantly involved in literary warfare. His entire career was a battleground marked with never-ending critical skirmishes with those less willing to give up art for revolution. Gold, the critic, was never compromising in his demand for a fact-filled fiction with clear revolutionary vision. This rigidity brought disagreement. In his biography of Ernest Hemingway, Carlos Baker recalled the time when Hemingway stormed into Mike Gold's office and demanded to see him. Gold was out and Hemingway left a message: "Tell Mike Gold that Ernest Hemingway says he should go fuck himself."<sup>58</sup> Others were perhaps not as blunt as the plain speaking Hemingway, but many must have felt a similar anger toward Gold, for Gold was always ready to use his sharp pen to chide those not marching directly with the revolutionary workers.

It was Gold's much discussed attack on Thornton Wilder in 1930 that began what Edmund Wilson called "The Literary Class War." Gold's attack on Wilder appeared in the pages of the widely read New Republic, and it provoked so much controversy that the magazine eventually was forced to call a moratorium on the issue. This article provoked what Wilson called "one of the most violent controversies which the literary world has lately known."<sup>59</sup>



The attack on Wilder was a vicious barrage of epithets characteristic of Gold's critical method. He was critical of Wilder for both his style, "diluted Henry James," and his content, "a masterly retreat into time and space." Gold detested the slick, smug style that reminded him of the conversation of French prostitutes. "Is this the style," Gold asked, "with which to express America?" But what provoked Gold even more was Wilder's subject matter, the "Sunday-school tracts and boulevard piety" parading as serious fiction. Gold challenged Wilder to write a book about modern America. He saw Wilder as a poet for the genteel bourgeoisie who fear disturbing lessons from their fiction. Thus, Gold said, Wilder produced a body of fiction that was little more than a "vapid museum," a "historic junkshop" rather than an account of the real world. "Where," Gold asked, "are the modern streets of New York, Chicago and New Orleans in these little novels? Where are the cotton mills....Where are the child slaves of the beet fields? Where are the stockbroker suicides, the labor racketeers, or passion and death of the coal miners?"<sup>60</sup>

Most intellectuals of the period would have agreed with Gold that fiction must address itself to the contemporary crisis. But relatively few agreed with Gold's rigidity concerning artistic style. Josephine Herbst, the author of the highly acclaimed Rope of Gold trilogy written during the 30s, addressed Gold in the New Masses about his recent attacks on the concern with craft within the Partisan Review group of writers. She confessed that she was

deeply bothered by Gold's anti-intellectualism: "No one doubts your revolutionary intentions or ardor," she wrote, "but literature must be judged with the head as well as the bowels." She accused Gold of over-simplification of the issues and of blanket praise of worker's "sweat and song" and blanket condemnation of anything attempting to be art. She cautioned Gold about becoming "a watchdog for strictly working-class writing."<sup>61</sup>

Gold's critical writings reveal that he did indeed become this watch-dog. In his very early call for new art, "Towards Proletarian Art," Gold insisted that the old culture must die. In his characteristic emotional tone, Gold predicted that out of the death of the old culture a new worker's art would arise, the soul of the tenement pouring itself forth through the sensitive, articulate toilers. This new art would be in stark contrast to the complex and confused art of the aristocratic culture, for it would be the art of the masses: "Masses are never pessimistic," Gold cried, "masses are never sterile. Masses are never far from the earth. Masses are never far from the heaven. Masses go on--they are the eternal truth." The new art would take as its subject the current social revolution and all its manifestations--strike, boycott, mass-meeting and labor organization. Gold called these the only noble, truthful subjects for they rose far above the concern with personal moods depicted by past decadent cultures. Calling for an art arising from the

deepest depths upward, he predicted a great revolutionary renaissance "when there is singing and music rising in every American street, when in every American factory there is a drama group of the workers, when mechanics paint in their leisure, and farmers write sonnets."<sup>62</sup>

When Gold took over the New Masses in May, 1928, he attempted to exhort this renaissance into existence. In the editorial "Go Left, Young Writers" Gold summarized the new principles by which he would guide the magazine. He saw literature as a product of civilization "like steel or textiles....It is not any more mystic in its origin than a ham sandwich." Thus he rigidly tied literature to its social realities and denied any importance to its subtle artistic properties. Once again he dismissed the cynical, smart, and sophisticated art of the 20s as merely the decadent product of that era's prosperity. He affirmed that the only direction for a writer now was leftward; he emphasized that he did not mean the left of the old Village Bohemia and its "stale Paris posing" and "professional poetizing," but rather "the real thing; a knowledge of working class life in America gained from first-hand contacts, and a hard precise philosophy...based on economics, not verbalisms." Gold saw old Masses as a more upper class affair; the New Masses would search for the new proletarian literature written by the wild youth of the working-class. This writing would be outbursts of revolutionary feeling with no time for polish or style. Gold insisted

that this plain talk of working experience would be the real stuff of the new literature.<sup>63</sup>

Gold believed that this new literature would arise from workers who were used to technical precision, not "vague fumbling poetry." Thus it would be a literature of fact, of the real experiences of the working class and not of the "sickly mental states of idle Bohemians, their subtleties, their sentimentalities, their fine-spun affairs." These new worker-artists would not be interested in "verbal acrobatics"; they would use as few words as possible combined with swift action and direct line. This new poetry of fact would avoid the drabness, futility and despair of the past; it would embody the hope of the future.<sup>64</sup>

Gold's new poetry would be a dangerous poetry, a poetry that would frighten club-ladies, support the Miner's Union, attack Henry Ford, and hurt big-business. Its voice would thunder like a ten-ton truck. To those who would cry propaganda, Gold replied with his own name calling: "You nuns, you half-wit poets, you self-licking cats!" The new poetry could no longer deal with degenerate middle-class life; it would have to focus on the heroic revolutionary worker, the only true subject for the new renaissance.<sup>65</sup>

Gold took conscious steps to usher in this new renaissance that he was so forcefully predicting ("we promise you a hundred Shakespeares," Gold once said). He encouraged all workers to contribute to the New Masses.

He denounced all concerns with craft: "Don't worry about style, snytax or grammar. Write as you talk....Everyone knows how to write. There is no trick to it....In Soviet Russia everyone is writing." He also told the bourgeoisie writers how to turn their decadent confessions into real proletarian art. In his "New Program for Writers" he proposed that all writers attach themselves to a particular industry and spend the next few years in close scrutiny of that industry. The writer would study the industry from every angle and would confine his writing to strike pamphlets, union publicity, and detailed technical accounts of the industry. In this way the writers would gain solid roots.<sup>66</sup>

Given Gold's critical theories, his history as a militant sectarian, and his adoring obedience to Stalin's communist party in the pages of the New Masses, it would seem reasonable to assume that his own fiction would be the thinly disguised formula that he was constantly trying to coax into existence in his essays and reviews. Such was not the case. Gold could and did write simple tracts. His "Strike: A Mass Recitation" which appeared in the New Masses, stands as an example of the worst tendencies of the decade. Claiming that his mass recitation was "art that has grown out of the workers' life and needs; it is useful art," Gold called for its performance on a bare platform of an ordinary union hall. The characters in the recitation were personifications of Wealth, Poverty, Capitalists,

sweatshops, bawdy houses and Tammany Hall. This is a record of the frustrations and tragedy of that dream of America gone sour. But Gold does not sacrifice the truth to political visions. The workers in Jews Without Money are not the virtuous toilers of Gold's editorials; they are "a defeated army" which often preys on itself. The father in this work is aspiring to the middle class and he looks down upon radicals and informs on his fellow workers in order to advance. The central narrator is a sensitive young man who sees many sides of the ghetto, its laughter and its tragedy. He searches throughout the book for an escape from these slums and centers his hopes on a Messiah. But the book's constant focus is the present, the sharp immediate sensations of the narrator rather than a vague future of some kind. It is only in a clumsy conclusion that the book makes an overt political statement. In the final dozen lines the narrator abruptly dedicates himself to the worker's revolution. But this ending seems forced and tacked-on after the wide, whole, vivid and successful narrative.<sup>68</sup>

Jews Without Money was something less than party ideologues had hoped for. In an ironic reversal Gold found himself a victim of dogmatic criticism. The party reviewer, Melvin Levy, found the book to be strong in its creation of convincing people and their varied personalities. Yet because Gold "is a communist," and it should be his constant effort "to subdue his skill to a revolutionary purpose," the

Masses, and Police. "Above all," Gold cautioned, "no individualism." Gold wanted the recitation performed by workers, for professional actors would seem "silly." He felt that the work was a perfectly fine weapon for worker's solidarity. The dialogue was stark, bare, exclamatory phrases. Poverty chanted "Give us bread!" The Masses chanted "Too long have we suffered!" At the work's end a Young Leader arrived and led the Masses in strike chants.<sup>67</sup>

But this is not the work we remember. Gold's autobiographical novel Jews Without Money continues to be read for its honest recreation of life in the urban ghetto. The book is not obedient to formula, but it is faithful to Gold's rich memory. Explicit politics play a very small role in Gold's book. It is the "endless pageant of East side life," the roaring, exploding, never sleeping excitement that the reader remembers:

People pushed and wrangled in the street. There were armies of howling pushcart peddlers. Women screamed, dogs barked and copulated. Babies cried. A parrot cursed. Ragged kids played under truck-horses. Fat housewives fought from stoop to stoop; a beggar sang.

It is this vivid world of childhood gangs, hot summers, nights of storytelling, cockroaches, bedbugs, dancing to hand organs, and the discovery of grass growing in the sidewalk cracks that Gold presented in his book.

There is an implicit political theme to the book, tightly woven into the brief tales and sketches that comprise the work. The Jews had fled the European pogroms hoping to find a New Promised Land. They found only the

reviewer found the work inadequate. He found the characters to be not revolutionary proletarian masses, but simple poor people. He scolded Gold for portraying individuals rather than a class. Gold's people were helpless, the victims of accidents rather than conscious workers who control the future. The reviewer felt the book contained too much Jewish identity and too little revolutionary ideology. It failed to document the rise of labor organizations on the East Side.

Gold responded first with submission to "comrade" Levy's criticism. He denounced the bourgeoisie literature of Proust and Joyce and called for a recognition of proletarian writers and the new revolutionary literature of Russia. But after this expression of his own Marxist sectarianism, Gold suggested that perhaps Levy was too fixed in his literary opinions. Gold said that his book was genuine, for it embraced a "revolutionary spirit." He could not have written the book that Levy called for because he had not witnessed the growth of East Side Labor unions first hand. But he had witnessed the motley spectacle of the Jewish ghetto: "I could do nothing else honestly and emotionally at the time," Gold wrote, "I could only describe what I had seen with my own eyes. I did not want to falsify the emotional values and bring in material that I did not feel." Gold, the emotional artist, was simply not willing to practice what Gold, the communist critic, so vocally preached.<sup>69</sup>



Granville Hicks, a co-editor with Gold on the New Masses staff, said, with Levy, that the narrator in Jews Without Money enlisted in the revolutionary cause "without sufficient preparation."<sup>70</sup> Hicks, like Gold, preached a narrow artistic creed in his critical writings that was a direct result of his communist politics. In the New Masses symposium "How I Came to Communism" Hicks related that he went left after becoming skeptical of his Wilsonian liberalism during the tragedy of Sacco and Vanzetti. With the collapse of 1929 he felt that the old capitalist myths were destroyed. "My present attitude," Hicks said in echoing the feeling of many intellectuals of the era, "is as much a product of the depression as if I had been forced out on the streets to beg for food." Hicks wanted to offer something to the revolutionary struggle; given his intellectual background, he decided to wage his fight on the literary front. "Criticism must be a weapon if it is not merely an amusing game," Hicks said, "and I know in what cause that weapon shall be wielded."<sup>71</sup>

Hicks wielded a vicious weapon in his barrages from the pages of the New Masses. He first appeared as a critic in the magazine in February of 1933 with his article "The Crisis in American Criticism." Here he began by looking at the low state of literary criticism in twentieth century America. He echoed previous New Masses attacks on impressionists, humanists, aesthetes, and all other schools and individuals engaged in criticism. But, Hicks asserted that the depression of 1929 brought clarity out of the

existing confusion. With the economic crisis it became clear, Hicks felt, that Marxism "offered the only possible method for the solution of the literary problems that the critics of the post-war period had so miserably bungled." In conclusion, Hicks outlined precisely how the Marxian critic should judge a book. First, the critic must insist on the "centrality of subject and theme"; that is, Hicks insisted, the novel must deal with the class struggle since that struggle was the central fact of the current historical epoch. Second, the book must present this struggle with "intensity"; that is, the critic must insist that the author convey the importance of this class struggle to the reader. Finally, the critic must demand that the point of view of the novel be that of "the vanguard of the proletariat." Hicks insisted that the author of the work identify with the revolutionary proletariat as completely as possible. In this way literature would rouse a sense of solidarity with class-conscious workers and a loyalty to revolutionary struggle.<sup>72</sup>

This definite and narrow bias led Hicks to attack many of the giants of modern fiction within the pages of the New Masses and to abuse fellow radical-intellectuals whose works failed to embody the clear line that Hicks recommended. For these reasons Alfred Kazin called Hicks the "little Calvin on the left"; Kazin respected Hicks' intelligence and his exceptional scholarship, but he saw that Hicks was a man "upon whom Marxism worked as a strong

drink." Kazin saw that Hicks was constantly writing categories, and outlining blueprints for ideal revolutionary masterpieces, and scolding writers for alleged pessimism. "He had a picture in his mind of the perfect communist writer," Kazin said, "and always wondered a little sadly why no one fitted the picture."<sup>73</sup>

Both Hicks' intelligence and his rigidity are in prominent display in his The Great Tradition, a critical work that attempted a Marxist interpretation of American literature. The work stands as a key document of the decade, for it illustrates both the decade's intense interest in the relevance of art and the dogmatism that plagued some of the most militant intellectuals. Hicks stated his bias in the book's opening: "Believing that criticism is always a weapon, I see no reason to disguise, either from others or myself, the nature of the conflict in which I am engaged or the side that I have chosen." This bias played a minor, but every present and irritating role throughout the book. Hicks managed to discuss a wide range of literature with insight, and he brought a solid sense of the economic and social realities of each literary age to the study. But these insightful discussions followed an every present pattern; after presenting an articulate and accurate summary of each author, Hicks, without fail, would qualify his praise of the author's artistic achievement in light of his inability to follow a specific revolutionary ideal. For example, in his discussion of our literary heritage from

the pre-Civil War period, Hicks praised Thoreau's independence from materialism, Hawthorne's realization of the consequences of pride and isolation, and Melville's use of the reality of Nantucket whalers to envision the undying struggle against evil. But Hicks found Thoreau's isolation and individualism inadequate; Hawthorne failed to achieve the first rank of greatness because of his neglect of contemporary life for the remoteness of allegory; and Melville did not adequately explore evil as it presented itself in the economics of whaling. They were all great writers, but Hicks found that they failed to guide the depression generation in a significantly revolutionary direction.<sup>74</sup>

In this manner Hicks surveyed our entire literary past. Twain was honest and possessed great frontier courage and buoyancy; yet in his best work he turned to the nostalgic past rather than to the economic realities of the present. The entire regionalist movement itself failed, for it sought to recreate the sectional life of a vanished era rather than to record rising industrialism, monopoly capitalism, and the complexities of modern life. Henry James, of course, received much abuse. Hicks felt James' decision to be an expatriate was a costly mistake. Hicks said James should have aimed less for an art of subtle enjoyment and more for an art of action. He attacked the "remoteness" of James' fictional world. James' characters have no economic reality; their lives

involve only the subtlest nuances of thought and emotion and the minutest distinctions in problems of conduct. "How," Hicks asked, "are we to relate such lives as these to such lives as ours?"

Hicks early and correctly viewed Emily Dickinson as the supreme poet of her age. He saw her freedom from poetic cliché and the originality of her perceptions. But, again, he found her to be too "fragile and remote." The muckrakers were a positive force, but they failed in regarding their exposures as sufficient; they should have formulated a precise remedy to the abuses they so ably documented. Hicks' catalogue continued; his Great Tradition contains brilliant discussions of Norris, Crane, Jack London, Dreiser, Anderson, Lewis, Robinson, Frost, and many more of our best writers. But his skillful and helpful observations are ultimately clouded by his demand that each author concern himself with the class struggle and the Socialist future. In many cases, this demand strikes the reader as unrealistic and somewhat absurd. Hicks expected each author to see a definite communist historical pattern and to guide the readers to this vision. Hicks obviously saw what our past writers were attempting to do and he was aware of their success in achieving their individual artistic tasks; but criticism, for Hicks, was not a question of what the writer had accomplished, but rather what Hicks felt should have been done.

In his final chapter, "Direction," Hicks discussed the writers of the 1930s. Here at last, Hicks' praise

became unqualified. Hicks saw in this new literature a direction and unity that belied the actual independence of the authors. But Hicks was intoxicated by the great future ahead and he momentarily forgot the pessimism and individualism of the 30s generation that he so often attacked in his New Masses columns. Here in this final chapter Hicks discussed the artistic benefits of the clarifying effect of revolutionary allegiance.<sup>75</sup>

In later editions of The Great Tradition Hicks included an afterword in which he admitted that he had been too dogmatic and didactic. He regreted, in particular, his harsh treatments of James, Frost, Eliot and Faulkner. This afterword was a product of Hicks' reappraisal of his revolutionary ideology. Like many of the militant radical intellectuals of the 30s, Hicks found it increasingly difficult to support the communist party as the decade waned. In the face of Stalin's increasing dictatorial powers, with the purge of former Soviet heroes in the Moscow trials, and finally with the Nazi-Soviet pact in the Fall of 1939, many felt that the Russian experiment had soured. Hicks resigned from the New Masses in October, 1939, and in an editorial at that time the magazine attacked their former comrade for his alleged sellout.<sup>76</sup>

Looking back at his depression experience, Hicks spoke with the broad vision that he had often suppressed in favor of a rigid party line. He saw his commitment to communism as a necessary and natural step; the decade

shocked many into a search for alternatives and the party offered the possibility of a better system. But Hicks viewed the party's manipulation of literature with distaste: "By joining the communist party," Hicks said, "I had committed my future to a group of politicians, and I ought to have kept a much sharper eye on them than I did. Politics is no game for a person whose attention is mostly directed elsewhere." Hicks was fundamentally interested in literature, not politics. The Party had a disastrous effect on much of the criticism within the New Masses, Hicks felt. But he believed that the literature of the decade had managed to avoid narrowness and rigidity.<sup>77</sup>

In an important symposium conducted by the American Scholar journal in 1966, many of the key figures of the 1930s met to discuss that decade's literature. Here Hicks sat with William Phillips, an editor of the Partisan Review, the journal that Hicks had frequently attacked in the New Masses. In speaking on the Partisan Review and its unique role during the 1930s, Phillips said that as the magazine matured its editors became more and more critical of the way the communist party "acted like an octopus, putting its hands on everything and trying to keep everything under control." So, Phillips explained, the Partisan Review broke from the party and attempted to forge a radical literature absolutely free of the direction and supervision of any political group or organization. Hicks replied "I now think you were entirely right."<sup>78</sup>

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#### CHAPTER IV: THE PARTISAN REVIEW: ITS CRITICAL CONCERNS

We learn not to expect a political, certainly not an immediately political, effect from a work of art; and in removing from art a burden of messianic responsibility which it never has discharged and cannot discharge we may leave it free to do whatever it can do.

Lionel Trilling writing in  
the Partisan Review

My own bias amounts to a polemical position developed in the 30s and one which I am still more or less committed to. This position, shared mostly by a group of young writers associated at that time with the Partisan Review, was for purity in politics and impurity in literature. Politically, this meant a stand for morality in politics. In literature, it meant a radicalism rooted in tradition and open to experiment, and an awareness that the imagination could not be contained within any orthodoxy. It meant that one could not rule out any literary beliefs or forms as incompatible with socialist aims.

William Phillips, editor of  
the Partisan Review

Any magazine, we believe, that aspires to a place in the vanguard of literature today, will be revolutionary in tendency; but we are also convinced that any such magazine will be unequivocally independent. Partisan Review is aware of its responsibility to the revolutionary movement in general, but we disclaim obligation to any of its organized political expressions. Indeed we think that the cause of revolutionary literature is best served by a policy of no commitments to any political party.

Partisan Review editorial,  
December, 1937



The strongest writers of the thirties used politics and were not used by it.

Daniel Aaron, Writers on the Left

The writer by no means looks on his work as a means. It is an end in itself.

Karl Marx

Founded as an organ of the New York John Reed Club, the early Partisan Review was closely associated with the orthodox Communist political organization. The Reed Clubs had been founded in New York in 1929 by Joseph Freeman and Michael Gold. By 1932 the organization had spread to many cities and a national meeting of a dozen of the clubs affirmed the militant principles adopted by the international writers and artists conference at Kharkov. A "Draft Manifesto of John Reed Clubs" was presented in the New Masses at this time and it revealed the revolutionary ideology basic to the Club. The Manifesto began with an attack on capitalism which the depression had stripped to its essence of "robbery and fraud, unemployment and terror, starvation and war." The failure of capitalism as an economic system, the Manifesto stated, was paralleled in its cultural bankruptcy and decay. Intellectuals saw the decay of capitalism and the contrasting example of the growing economy and culture of the Soviet Union. To steer these intellectuals in the appropriate direction and, more importantly, to encourage revolutionary workers to develop their culture, were the tasks of the John Reed

Clubs. These Clubs were open to all writers willing to defend the Soviet Union, "fight fascism," and struggle for the revolutionary labor movement and against bourgeois values. The Club Manifesto called for all artists to abandon "the treacherous illusion that art can exist for art's sake, or that the artist can remain remote from the historic conflicts in which all men must take sides." Writers were urged to join in forging a new art "that shall be a weapon in the battle for a new and superior world."<sup>1</sup>

In practice the Reed Clubs offered the radical intellectuals a much-needed forum for expression of their ideas on revolutionary art. They organized exhibits of paintings, founded dance groups and agit-prop theatre, held open meetings for the discussion of proletarian literature, sponsored film and photography leagues, established worker's schools for the study of painting and fiction, and held lectures and demonstrations. Perhaps their most important function was the publishing of revolutionary magazines in their various home cities: Leftward was published by the Club of Boston, Left Review grew out of the Philadelphia Club, Left Front was the organ of the Chicago Club. The Partisan Review itself was started by the New York City John Reed Club.

Thus the Partisan Review sprang from a definite revolutionary background. The New Masses was initially friendly to the new magazine. There was cooperation between these two journals in this early stage of the

Partisan Review's career because of their common dedication to revolutionary change and because the Partisan Review's dedication to creative literature was not yet the mature directing force it would soon become. Mike Gold himself presided over fund raising dinners for the Partisan Review.<sup>2</sup> But this period of friendly cooperation was short-lived. The Partisan Review's growing dedication to creative literature soon brought it into open conflict with the more politically oriented New Masses.

It is interesting to review the history of the Partisan Review's conflict and eventual break with the communist party. This review will provide us with a chronological summary of the Partisan Review's movement toward political independence. We will then examine the aesthetic arguments of the Partisan Review's staff of critics, which often clashed with the orthodox communist views.

An early indication of this brewing conflict between the Partisan Review and the New Masses was Granville Hicks' article "Our Magazines and their Functions" published in the December, 1934 issue of New Masses. Less than a year after the beginning of the Partisan Review, Hicks questioned its usefulness. His article was a review of radical periodicals and his stated goal was the reduction of needless waste and duplication in the field of radical journalism. Because of the difficulty and sacrifice necessary in raising funds to support radical magazines, Hicks undertook this

survey to determine whether or not each magazine was making a specific and unique contribution to the revolutionary cause. Hicks stated that it was of utmost importance that the New Masses be given every opportunity to perform its task: "This may sound immodest," Hicks admitted, "but there is no sense in mincing words. The New Masses is the principal organ of the revolutionary cultural movement." So Hicks argued that no work need appear in other revolutionary journals that could be handled by the New Masses. Funds should be spent in making the New Masses stronger rather than in supporting other magazines with similar functions. Many Reed Club publications were necessary, Hicks said, because they were needed outlets for Club members who could not get published in more bourgeois journals. But Hicks did not think that the Partisan Review was a typical Club publication; he noted that in its five issues a large proportion of the writing came not from struggling Reed Club worker-writers, but from more established intellectuals. Noting also that the Partisan Review published a great deal of cultural criticism, Hicks remarked that this function was paralleled in the New Masses. "On the whole," Hicks concluded in his review of the Partisan Review, "relatively little is accomplished that would not or could not be accomplished by other magazines."<sup>3</sup>

Mike Gold turned his attention to the Partisan Review in a New Masses article that discussed the Partisan

Review's merger with the Anvil magazine in early 1936.

Gold praised the vigorous, male proletarian writing of the Anvil magazine, but was surprised by its marriage to the "erudite, intellectual female" Partisan Review. Gold's article soon turned into an attack on James Farrell, a mainstay of the Partisan Review. Gold harshly questioned Farrell's ability as an author and critic. Gold said he wanted to see clear revolutionary joy in literature, not the sour intelligence of the Partisan Review critics.<sup>4</sup>

Hicks agreed with Gold's estimation of the Partisan Review. He accused the Partisan Review editors of excessive pedantry. Pointing specifically to William Phillips and Philip Rahv, the chief editors of the Partisan Review throughout the 1930s, Hicks said they had now discovered "consciousness" and "intelligence" and were recommending them to American writers. Agreeing that these were sound doctrines, Hicks said it would carry more weight if the Partisan Review critics practiced what they preached. Hicks, like Gold, was troubled by the lack of clear, affirmative revolutionary vision in the fiction and criticism of the new journal.<sup>5</sup> The Partisan Review was not following the prescribed formula of the New Masses.

Both Hicks and Gold were reacting to the steady and obvious growth of the Partisan Review away from the literary rigidity and political manipulation of the communist party. In April of 1935 the Reed Clubs were abolished as the communist party moved toward its Popular Front policies.

This move gave the Partisan Review formal independence. The Partisan Review made note of this change in its July-August issue, declaring that the magazine was no longer a Club organ, but rather a "revolutionary literary magazine" whose purpose was "to print the best revolutionary literature and Marxist criticism in this country and abroad."<sup>6</sup>

The Partisan Review editorial of the December, 1937 issue placed in the foreground the smoldering conflict between the journal and the communist party that had been previously confined to snipes at the Partisan Review from Hicks and Gold and to the heterodox artistic and critical positions that were maturing in the Partisan Review. With this issue the Partisan Review announced itself to be "unequivocally independent." The Partisan Review would continue to be "revolutionary in tendency" but it would no longer be obligated to a single political party. Convinced that literature should be free from factional politics, the Partisan Review lashed out at the literary dangers inherent in close party ties. Automatic political responses brought increasingly less responsible literary judgments. Communist party literary critics were equipped with the "zeal of vigilantes" and this often led to the outlawing of all dissenting opinions. Especially distasteful to the Partisan Review was the "projection on the cultural field of factionalism in politics," for this often provoked ruinous bitterness among authors. The Partisan Review characterized those intellectuals too close to official

party ties as armed to the teeth with slogans and weak in genuine literary authority.

The Partisan Review recognized that it would now be attacked as fascist or Trotskyist; they saw that every effort would be made to discredit their independence. But the Partisan Review asserted that it would not be dislodged from its independent position by any political campaign waged against it by the official party press. They would not ignore the communist party as a sign of the times, but they would not hesitate to question the party's authority in the literary field. The Partisan Review was dedicated to the cultural field; because of this focus, it would not dictate "conformity to a given social ideology or to a prescribed attitude or technique" to its writers. The split with the communist party was now fully in view. The December, 1937, editorial stated:

Formerly associated with the communist party, Partisan Review strove from the first against its drive to equate the interest of literature with those of factional politics. Our reappearance on an independent basis signifies our conviction that the totalitarian trend is inherent in that movement and that it can be no longer combated from within.<sup>7</sup>

The response to the Partisan Review's declaration of independence was interesting. As predicted, the party and its official voices, including the New Masses, attacked the Partisan Review circle as fascists, counter-revolutionaries, and turncoats.<sup>8</sup> Letters to the Partisan Review revealed a mixture of opinion, with one reader, a "class-conscious worker," reporting that he threw the fascist

December issue into the garbage pail and the pail regurgitated it. But there were many more enthusiastic responses to the Partisan Review's new independence, including praise from John Dos Passos, Edmund Wilson, Andre Gide, and Ignazio Silone.<sup>9</sup> Poetry magazine raised a key issue. Poetry praised the Partisan Review's rejection of sectarian bias in the cultural field, but questioned whether or not a magazine professedly revolutionary in character could avoid having some definite political program, explicit or implied. Poetry applauded the political independence of the Partisan Review, but doubted its claim to still be a revolutionary magazine.

The Partisan Review answered Poetry decisively: "Our program is the program of Marxism, which means being for the revolutionary overthrow of capitalist society, for the workers government, and for international socialism." As for the role of literature, the Partisan Review admitted being skeptical of the old revolutionary imperatives. Marxist ideology could guide literature, but it should not rigidly direct it. Literature was not, the Partisan Review felt, a weapon in the class war in any direct sense. That is, the Partisan Review answered Poetry by re-affirming its revolutionary political ideology and by pointing to its emphasis on variety and integrity in the literary field.

From the December, 1937 issue through the remainder of the decade the Partisan Review maintained a hostile attitude toward the communist party and its literary



policies. In March of 1938 William Phillips contributed "The Esthetic of the Founding Fathers" to the Partisan Review, an examination of classical Marxist attitudes toward literature. Phillips, an editor and mainstay of the journal throughout the 1930s, found that the current party and its puppets like the New Masses had cultivated a myth that there exists a ready-made set of esthetic principles, fashioned by Marx himself, that revolutionary writers today must follow. Phillips charged the Stalinists with a gross distortion of the past in order to support the present factional needs of the party. Phillips found that Marx was not a literary critic; he had no fully developed esthetic system. Marx and Engles avoided tying literature down to rigid formulas. "In fact," Phillips wrote, "many of the statements of the founding fathers on literature read like polemics against the kind of 'Marxist criticism' practiced by Michael Gold and Granville Hicks."

Phillips cleared away the myths, lies, and distortions about Marxist criticism propagated by what he called the self-seeking Stalinists and went on in his article to consider the positive possibilities for true Marxist criticism. He praised Edmund Wilson for his intelligent left-wing criticism and enthusiastically quoted Wilson's dictum that "Marxism by itself can tell us nothing whatsoever about the goodness or badness of a work of art." That is, both Wilson and Phillips believed that a critic must possess taste and intelligence as well as a grounding

in Marx in order to write successful Marxist literary criticism. The Marxist view was important, Phillips made clear, because it illuminated the social significance, values, and ideas of a work. But it must not be dogmatic. Therefore, Phillips suggested that it would be more fruitful to speak of Marxist criticisms, in the plural, or of "Marxist ventures into criticism." This would help eliminate the closed system of formula presently practiced by the rigid Stalinists. Phillips saw their abuse of criticism as little more than "a form of scholasticism in overalls."<sup>11</sup>

In the next issue of Partisan Review Philip Rahv, who, with Phillips, edited and guided the journal throughout the decade, continued this renunciation of Stalinism in his article "Trials of the Mind." Here Rahv characterized the Stalinist regime in Moscow as the betrayer of the socialist revolution. He called on intellectuals not to be deceived by the rhetoric and slogans. Intellectuals were the guardians of culture, Rahv insisted, and the Stalinists were undercutting this role: "In this period one cannot accept degrading techniques and procedures without degrading one's own intellectual discipline, without impairing its worth."<sup>12</sup>

The Partisan Review widened the breach between itself and the Stalinists even more when it published a lengthy letter from Leon Trotsky, the arch-enemy of the Moscow communists. Trotsky, writing on "Art and Politics,"

said that the October revolution in Russia had been a great impetus to art but that now bureaucratic reaction had set in and official Soviet art was based on "lies and deceit." Artists were now reduced to functionaries armed with pens and brushes, forced to draw the crude lines of historical falsification. To counter the cultural lies of Stalinism, Trotsky called for honest art: "Art can become a strong ally of revolution only in so far as it remains faithful to itself. Poets, painters, sculptors, and musicians will themselves find their own approaches and methods."<sup>13</sup>

As an alternative to Stalinist rigidity, the Partisan Review endorsed a new group of revolutionary writers and artists founded by Andre Breton and Diego Rivera, two radical artists who rejected Stalinism. They proposed a federation of artists "left-wing in tendency and free of all organizational dependence," and the Partisan Review printed their manifesto calling for the foundation of the International Federation of Independent Revolutionary Art. The Partisan Review declared itself to be in complete sympathy with the aims of this new group and ready to take part in the formation of an American section of the Federation. Their manifesto, "Towards a Free Revolutionary Art," stressed the unique nature of the creative act, its individual and subjective origins. This was in obvious contrast to Mike Gold who felt art was totally a product of economic and social conditions. Because art was "the fruit of precious chance," the Manifesto called for a

safeguarding of the conditions under which intellectual creation could occur. A key condition necessary for artistic creation, the Manifesto proclaimed, was freedom: "No authority, no dictation, not the least trace of orders from above!"

True art, the Manifesto insisted, could not arise from variations on ready-made models, but rather must spring from the inner needs of man. Therefore, the Manifesto called for artists everywhere to reject the debasement of art represented by the Soviet Union. The present Soviet Union was found to be hostile to art; the true communist revolution would not be afraid of art and would not regulate art. The Manifesto called for a free choice of themes and the absence of all restrictions on the range of the artists' explorations:

In the realm of artistic creation, the imagination must escape from all constraint and must, under no pretext, allow itself to be placed under bonds.... we repeat our deliberate intention of standing by the formula--complete freedom for art.

The Manifesto made it clear that in defending freedom of thought it was not justifying political indifference. The Manifesto was not a call for "pure" art and political reaction. Maintaining that its conception of the role of art was too high to refuse it an influence on society, the Manifesto said that the supreme task of art at this time was to take part actively and consciously in the revolution. Their stated aims were: "The independence of art--for the revolution; the revolution--for the independence of art."<sup>14</sup>

A short time later the Partisan Review printed a statement of the League For Cultural Freedom and Socialism which declared itself to be in general agreement with the principles set forth in the manifesto of Breton and Rivera. The statement of the League For Cultural Freedom and Socialism was an appeal to all writers and artists to unite in forming a revolutionary league to combat reactionary tendencies in intellectual life. The statement pointed to the Soviet Union as a principal enemy of revolutionary culture in the late 1930s. The cultural organizations under control of the party were said to be little more than apologists for the Kremlin dictatorship, outlawing all dissenting opinion, poisoning the intellectual atmosphere, and attempting to impose their views and methods on independent artists. This league called for a defense of the independence of writers and artists, for culture by its very nature cannot tolerate manipulation; true intellectual creation was incompatible with conformity. "We demand complete freedom for art....No dictation by party or government."

Once again this Partisan Review endorsed organization made it clear that this free art would not be unengaged; it would work toward social revolution. The liberation of culture was inseparable from the liberation of all humanity. Capitalism, like Soviet reaction, was found to be incompatible with true art. Only in the "revolutionary reconstruction of society" could a true free art and culture grow to

its potential fulfillment. The statement of the League and its call for a revolutionary yet free art was signed by many of the key members of the Partisan Review circle, including the editors Phillips and Rahv.<sup>15</sup>

As the decade drew to a close, the Partisan Review continued its rejection of Stalinist literary rigidity and political treachery. In his article "Twilight of the Thirties," Philip Rahv pointed to the Stalinists as the chief threat to intellectual integrity. The social revolutionary movement of the 1930s had promised to re-vitalize literature, Rahv pointed out, but the Soviet Union undermined this promise by imposing a rigid outlook rather than encouraging experiment and imagination. Politics and art need not be antagonistic, Rahv insisted. The artist need only maintain his own voice, integrity, craftsmanship and sensibility while engaging his art in the social scene.<sup>16</sup>

In the Fall of 1939 the Partisan Review's distrust of the Soviet Union peaked with the Nazi-Soviet Pact. The Partisan Review editorial in its last issue of the decade spoke of the exposure of the real political content of Stalinism: "The liberals and fellow-travelers have been shocked...into recognizing that the Kremlin's interests are not those of the international working class but rather those of--the Kremlin." Stalin, the Partisan Review said, had now shown his true political stance, fascist imperialism.<sup>17</sup>

The Partisan Review had many reasons for formally breaking with the communist party in December, 1937, and

maintaining a vocal hostility toward the communists throughout the decade. Politically, the Partisan Review distrusted Stalin. They viewed him as a repressive dictator who was killing the revolutionary spirit with purges, trials, secret police, and various other reactionary tactics. Aesthetically, the Partisan Review critics formulated attitudes toward literature that contrasted significantly with the orthodox party views which were examined in our discussion of the New Masses. Characteristically, the Partisan Review demanded that art remain free of political manipulation. Closely linked to this demand was a rejection of "leftism," the term used by Partisan Review critics to describe radical rigidity and dogmatism in the literary arena. Thirdly, the Partisan Review recognized the value of literary tradition. Finally, Partisan Review critics typically supported a variety of themes and techniques in revolutionary fiction. That is, they saw revolutionary value in literature that was often rejected by orthodox party critics. Through this support, the Partisan Review introduced their readers to a wide field of authors, books, and movements.

The Partisan Review had many aesthetic reasons for maintaining its independent position. A primary one was to keep literature free from political expediency. The spectacle of the literary manipulation involved in the party's Popular Front policy was one key factor in the journal's decision to shun party allegiance. The Partisan Review viewed the Popular Front policy as a violation of

the integrity of revolutionary literature and it repeatedly stressed the reactionary nature of Popular Front literary dictates in its articles and reviews.

Edmund Wilson contributed a play to the Partisan Review in June, 1938, that was a satire on Stalin and his Popular Front policy. Marx himself was a character in the play; he was a despicable character constantly spouting rhetoric and cliché. He was revealed as the ultimate opportunist, manipulating and lying in order to gain his goals. Marx was shown to be courting a member of the feudal nobility. When criticized for this abuse of class-consciousness, Marx replied; "you are mistaken...the correct line is a popular front which will take in the liberal nobility as well as the militant working class." At the play's end Marx yelled "forward to Socialist inequality and democracy," removed his mask and revealed the smiling face of Stalin.<sup>18</sup>

This hostility to the communist party's manipulation of political and literary attitudes with its Popular Front policy was central to the Partisan Review and to many independent radical intellectuals in the late 1930s. An early manifestation of the Popular Front was the replacement of the militant Reed Clubs for the broader League of American Writers. The Partisan Review endorsed the call for the first congress of the League in 1935, but stressed that as a journal it was primarily interested in clarification of aesthetic matters that might occur at the congress



rather than the formation of a defensive political base.<sup>19</sup> The Partisan Review devoted an entire issue to discussion of the literary problems which they wanted to see considered at the first congress. The contributions to this issue focused on literary style and craftsmanship to such a degree that Granville Hicks was forced to warn the Partisan Review that it was over-emphasizing form while neglecting history and economics.<sup>20</sup>

The first congress, as we saw in the last chapter, was characterized by a wide-ranging discussion of the aesthetic problems confronted by radical intellectuals. Again the emphasis on craft, particularly among writers associated with the Partisan Review, disturbed the more rigidly militant and Hicks warned the congress that "the preoccupation with technical problems may lead to formalism, which will let the art-for-art's sake dogma in the back door."<sup>21</sup>

As the political motives behind the formation of the League became more clear, the Partisan Review disassociated itself from this popular front organization. Even in the midst of its financial difficulties in late 1936, the Partisan Review shunned a possible merger with the League of American Writers that would have resulted in financial stability.<sup>22</sup> By the time of the second Congress of American Writers the League had been shaped into a utilitarian body to defend the Soviet Union against fascism. The Partisan Review circle did not formally attend this

second congress with its emphasis on Spain and its neglect of aesthetic concerns; rather, the Partisan Review group appeared at the congress as trouble-makers, disrupting a meeting chaired by Granville Hicks and attempting to discredit the Popular Front.<sup>23</sup>

The Partisan Review's renunciation of the second congress led to a series of barrages between the New Masses and the Partisan Review. This particular battle culminated in a letter to the New Masses from Phillips and Rahv. These two mainstays of the Partisan Review said with insight that the current split was not merely the result of their renunciation of the Popular Front policy, for "every informed reader and writer knows that the New Masses and the Partisan Review were constantly at loggerheads on the problem of revolutionary literature....What distinguished the Partisan Review from the New Masses was our struggle to to free revolutionary literature from domination by the strategy of a political party."<sup>24</sup>

This was the key to the Partisan Review's hostility toward the Popular Front policy. Popular Front manipulations were viewed as an assault on literary integrity. The Partisan Review felt that an emphasis on genuine revolutionary literature was being forsaken in favor of an emphasis on a large defensive political posture. Aesthetic concerns were taking a backseat to utilitarian motives. In a Partisan Review article ironically entitled "Two Years of Progress," Philip Rahv contrasted the first and second

meetings of the League of American Writers' Congresses. He saw a genuine concern for revolutionary literature at the first congress and mere political pragmatism at the second. He pointed to the exploitative abuses of the party in their Popular Front campaign: "In organizing gatherings of writers this party cleverly transforms its barrack ideology into the angelic diction of culture yearning." In the short span of two years the party switched from an ultra-left line to an embrace of all political ideologies short of outright fascism, and Rahv lamented the corresponding literary policies: "In the past nothing short of the sovietization of the literature of the whole world would do; today the gates of the dialectic have been thrown open to any successful money writer." Rahv charged the party with betrayal of the genuine movement toward revolutionary literature. Literature was, to the party, merely a pretext for the manipulation of ideas in favor of the current party policy. "To expect a bureaucratic, authoritarian regime to nourish a truly critical, revolutionary consciousness in art," Rahv warned, "is to expect miracles."<sup>25</sup>

The complete about-face on many literary attitudes and preferences in the New Masses that occurred as a result of the Popular Front was noted by the Partisan Review. The Partisan Review attempted to embarrass the New Masses by devoting a column to a juxtaposition of early New Masses literary pronouncements and its current opinions. Old

enemies were now courted and old favorites were now enemies. In an article "Substitution at Left-Tackle," the Partisan Review again poked fun at the shuffling of literary preferences at the New Masses magazine as a result of the Popular Front.

This rejection of literary manipulation was but one reason that the Partisan Review insisted on independence. A closely related aesthetic stance was the Partisan Review's rejection of "leftism," a term the Partisan Review coined to depict literary rigidity and dogmatism. This rejection of "leftism" was implicit in many of the Partisan Review's characteristic critical positions; it was introduced explicitly in an editorial jointly authored by Philip Rahv and William Phillips, "Problems and Perspectives in Revolutionary Literature." Here Rahv and Phillips catalogued the dangers inherent in narrow, militant radical criticism and fiction. Initially they praised the growth of radical American literature. They were particularly pleased with the radical novel and the spread of revolutionary little magazines. But they pointed out that all was not well. They saw the development of revolutionary literature as a varied, complex process. At this point Rahv and Phillips became critical of "leftism," their term for the vulgarization and simplification of true Marxism. This "leftism" often appeared as "a barrage of sloganized and inorganic writing" and as "a smoke screen of verbal revolutionism"; its tendency was to distort the complexity of human nature.

Rahv and Phillips called for a mature Marxist aesthetic position that would recognize the complexity of art and direct the revolutionary literary movement with high standards and wide vision. They insisted that this direction must not come in the form of "dogma or decree." Political content cannot be merely super-imposed on a work or tacked on at the end; it must be merged, they said, with the creation of complete personalities and the perception of human relations in their physical setting. Rahv and Phillips pledged that their journal would concentrate on bringing revolutionary literature to maturity; they would reject "revolutionary exhibitionism" in literature, simple forms and propaganda.<sup>26</sup>

"Leftism," then, was rejected by the Partisan Review. But, in its attempt to build a free, mature, varied, and artful revolutionary literature, the Partisan Review recognized that it could not dismiss the "bourgeois" literature of the past. A sense of tradition was important, the Partisan Review critics insisted, for revolutionary writers had many lessons to learn from writers of the past. Literature was more than content; in order to be effective a radical vision needed to be conveyed by a capable artistic medium, so the Partisan Review critics stressed the value of writers often dismissed by the New Masses. An example of this appeared in the very first issue of Partisan Review when Philip Rahv reviewed Hemingway's Winner Take Nothing. Like Gold and Hicks in their

pre-Popular Front period, Rahv spoke with distaste of Hemingway's substitution of virility and "pure animal feeling" for fundamental social emotion. Rahv admitted that a radical critic's evaluation of Hemingway's subject matter cannot but show its uselessness: "None the less... it would be sheer left doctrinarism wholly to discard the cluster of formal creative means which he evolved." Rahv was not willing merely to attack Hemingway's despair; his emphasis was on the usefulness of Hemingway's artistic style. He approved of the "dry and racy freshness" of Hemingway's prose and pointed to its pure naturalness and simple precision. Proletarian artists, Rahv insisted, had much to learn from bourgeois art, for proletarian art was threatened by "a certain mawkish idealization and sentimentality that repels rather than convinces the reader."<sup>27</sup>

In a later article, Rahv again insisted that by recognizing the negative social content of bourgeois art radical artists and critics could not assume that they had exhausted their relation to that art. That was the assumption of "left doctrinaires"; their distortions and gestures of curt dismissal merely confused the complex issue. The radical writer had much to learn from bourgeois art, Rahv insisted. He saw that the despair of much of this literature was itself a form of social criticism: "The middle class literature of despair--from Flaubert to E. E. Cummings--is indeed a protest against the bourgeois way of life."<sup>28</sup>

William Phillips agreed that it was the job of the radical intellectual not to dismiss bourgeois art, but rather "to tie these threads, to use whatever heritage there is at our disposal for our revolutionary tasks." Phillips called for a widened revolutionary tradition, an expanded audience, and an assimilation of many literary currents which, in the intensity of the struggle, had been ignored. He was clearly seeking a middle path between dogmatic "leftism" and ignorance of social realities:

The leftists repudiate the bourgeois heritage, and fall into primitive, oversimplified and pseudo-popular rewrites of political ideas and events.... The rightists are principally those who have not completed their transition, and who seek to assimilate the methods and sensibility of writers like Joyce and Eliot without a clear sense of the revolutionary purposes to which these influences should be bent.<sup>29</sup>

Many contributions by other critics during the decade reinforced this insistence on the value of tradition. Carl Van Doren called for the revolutionary artist to be aware of the radical nature of his American literary heritage. Unlike Hicks, Van Doren did not discuss the tradition simply to dismiss it for its shortcomings. Van Doren spoke of a rich process of assimilation that must occur during the thirties; he told the radical writers to dig deeply into the cultural past and learn from the revolutionary imagination of Emerson, the anarchism of Thoreau, the poetic fraternity of Whitman, and the great realism of Twain.<sup>30</sup>

Andre Gide contributed to the Partisan Review and he too defended the literature of the past, for "to deny

the past is a vain and absurd proceeding." The past is always the foundation for the future, Gide insisted, just as the breaking up of capitalism will bring socialism. Gide went on to articulate the high view of art implicit in much of the Partisan Review's attitudes and materials. He insisted that art was more than the imitation of reality. Gide agreed that the primary role of literature was to inform, but it must do that by suggestion and creation. In all enduring art there was more than a mere response to the momentary needs of a class or an era. Culture freed the mind, Gide insisted; it did not narrow its boundaries.<sup>31</sup>

The Partisan Review often stressed the value of bourgeois tradition because it would not limit its attention to the ideology of a work. Literature was both content and form, and the Partisan Review slighted neither. Typical of this broad perspective was their attitude toward T. S. Eliot. Like the New Masses critics, the Partisan Review recognized that Eliot's ideas were steering close to fascism. But in a review of Eliot's Murder in the Cathedral, Rahv insisted that the critic must look at the works anew, closely, without jumping to narrow conclusions. He praised the great poetry in this drama, its magnificent lucidity, and its simple structure. Rahv warned of distorted critical ideas that would focus only on the explicit ideology of a work of art and not allow the critic to enjoy the poetry of the work.<sup>32</sup>



William Phillips discussed the value of tradition in terms of the revolutionary writer's attempt to organically unite message and craft. In his essay "Form and Content," he attempted to answer the problem of the relation of form to content. Unlike Mike Gold who dismissed questions of form and told the writers to concentrate on content, the critics of the Partisan Review insisted on concerning themselves with the relationship of craft to message. Phillips sought a healthy critical vision, a fusion of awareness of the importance of both content and form: "Over-emphasis on content makes for didacticism, and over-emphasis on form gives precoisity. The two are interpenetrating, mutually affective elements."

In looking at writers of the past, Phillips urged revolutionary artists not to consider only the writers' isolated content. Phillips said that "sensibility," the fusion of idea and craft, was the key assimilable quality. Phillips told revolutionary writers to look to the fine examples of unified form and content in Shakespeare, Eliot, Joyce and Proust. Hemingway, too, was discussed, for Phillips saw that his lean idiom was well adapted to his message. The task of the revolutionary writer was the forging of a relatively new artistic sensibility, compounded of his Marxian outlook, proletarian experience, and an awareness of available literary examples of sensibility. Phillips spoke of a "continuum of sensibility" with the revolutionary writer introducing new revolutionary vision

upon successful traditional examples of the union of form and content. Phillips was calling for new study, new standards in revolutionary art and criticism, and a revaluation of tradition.<sup>33</sup>

The perspectives of revolutionary literature were broadened in the Partisan Review. The journal went beyond its critical emphasis on the value of tradition to stress the importance of intelligence in art. In stressing the revolutionary role of the intellectual, the Partisan Review turned its attention to many of the important figures in modern literature ignored or dismissed by the more militant critics. The Partisan Review introduced its readers to many new trends, ideas, and personalities in modern art. The Partisan Review rose above the extremes of the decade; it did not interest itself solely in worker's protest writings nor were its interests as indiscriminate as the Popular Front ideology would have. In its criticism and in its fictional offerings the Partisan Review sought to widen the scope of revolutionary literature. They recognized revolutionary potential in a wide range of authors and works.

This plea for discernment and call for a broadening of outlook was typical of the criticism of the Partisan Review. Alan Calmer wrote in the journal that proletarian literature was not a sect or a single type of art, but rather a whole class of literature containing several groupings and tendencies. It did not possess a single

position or dogma: "proletarian literature does not seek to delimit the scope of art but to extend its boundaries, opening new areas of experience to the writer." Calmer made it clear that art was much more than political message; party decree could not produce art nor could a party membership card be a guarantee of superb craftsmanship. Calmer was critical of Hicks and the New Masses, for they had failed to broaden the artistic perspectives of revolutionary literature.<sup>34</sup>

An important example of the Partisan Review's characteristic broad outlook toward revolutionary art was the case of Henry Roth's novel Call It Sleep, now recognized as one of the best novels of that decade.<sup>35</sup> Roth's book is a complex record of two years in the life of David Schearl, a Jewish immigrant child in Brownsville on the Lower East Side of New York City at the turn of the century. The book is filled with the poverty of the tenements from the rat-infested cellars to the dark stairways leading to ghetto rooftops. But the novel is involved with much more than poverty; through David's tortured imagination the reader is immersed in an oedipal world of guilt, fear, and desire. The sensitive boy's developing imagination integrates many threads including the tense relationship between father and mother. The outer tenement world and the boy's inner dreams are both presented with poetic intensity. The barriers to a full life here are psychological as well as economical. Through a complex maze of

dark and light imagery, David moves from the cellar, sex, the devil and death to fire, sparks, biblical messages and rebirth. Roth said of the novel, "I relied almost entirely on the imagination....there is one theme above all others, and that is redemption."<sup>36</sup>

Through the power of this imagination, Roth plunges deep into David's mind. David is possessed by a guilt he does not understand, a fear of darkness, and a yearning for the god he learns of at the Hebrew School. All the complex threads of the novel resolve in a final brilliant vision. David was being chased by his father for suspected sexual play and for stealing a rosary when, in the darkness, he shocked himself on the streetcar tracks. Then, in a sleep-like trance, David reviewed his world and accepted it:

He might as well call it sleep. It was only toward sleep that every wink of eyelids could strike a spark into the cloudy tinder of the dark, kindle out of shadowy corners of the bedroom such myraid and such vivid jets of images--of the glint on tilted beards, of the uneven shine on roller skates, of the dry light on grey stone stoops, of the tapering glitter of rails, of the oily sheen on the night-smooth rivers, of the glow on thin blond hair, red faces, of the glow on the outstretched, open palms of legions upon legions of hands hurtling toward him. He might as well call it sleep. It was only toward sleep that ears had power to cull again and reassemble the shrill cry, the hoarse voice, the scream of fear, the bells, the thick breathing, the roar of crowds and all sounds that lay fermenting in the vats of silence and the past. It was only toward sleep...that he could feel them all and feel, not pain, not terror, but strangest triumph, strangest acquiescence. One might as well call it sleep.<sup>37</sup>

This strange triumph, this imaginative synthesis of kaleidoscopic ghetto sensations and the dark and light

fears and hopes of the childhood dreams of David, was not the triumph sought by New Masses critics. They dismissed the book: "It is a pity that so many young writers drawn from the proletariat can make no better use of their working class experience than as material for introspective and febrile novels." However, the Partisan Review was able to appreciate the complexity of Roth's vision. The Partisan Review praised the skillful, profound, and mature handling of life in Roth's Call It Sleep. The journal saw that the work was conceived "in intense poetic and psychological terms" and written "in a rare and distinguished manner." The Partisan Review recognized the novel as one of the most outstanding books of the decade. In an insightful comparison, the Partisan Review linked Roth's novel with Joyce's Portrait of the Artist.<sup>38</sup> The two can be favorably compared; in both works the author uses the concrete social background as the important and ever-present stage for a complex and imaginative probing of the psychology of a maturing central character.

Because of its interest in imagination, sensibility, style, and intelligence, the Partisan Review was able to focus its critical concerns on a wide range of important authors. Phillips praised the fictional work of Andre Malraux. He regreted that more militant critics had focused on doctrinal errors in Malraux's views on China; these critics, he said, treated fiction as if it were a pamphlet of political observations rather than a work of various

insights into psychology, philosophy, and human sensitivity. Art was more than a "trumpet call to concrete action," and Phillips introduced his audience to the broad humanism of contemporary European artists.<sup>39</sup>

Edmund Wilson defended the art of Flaubert in the Partisan Review. He said there was much more to Flaubert than pure asceticism. Flaubert did not lack social concerns, Wilson insisted in response to the rigid rejection of Flaubert by the militant critics. Flaubert joined a craftsman's concern with language with a criticism of empty bourgeois society.<sup>40</sup> Wilson continued his defense of writers dismissed by the sectarians in his Partisan Review essay on the late career of Henry James. Wilson saw that James, in spite of his expatriation, contributed a great deal to an understanding of the American scene. Wilson praised James' realism and the profound insight and superior delicacy which James used to catch and understand the social state of wealthy Americans. Wilson felt it "foolish" to reproach James for having neglected economics. The effect of wealth is a constant theme in James, Wilson insisted. The wealth of James' Americans sets them up for exploitation.<sup>41</sup>

The Partisan Review critics recognized radical potential in a variety of authors and works. They were not insisting on shrill cries to revolution. They were pointing to the subtle revolutionary potential in works of imagination and intelligence. Late in the decade the Partisan Review became international in its scope, critically

studying the works of D. H. Lawrence, Thomas Mann, Dostoevsky, Proust, Yeats, and Kafka. Its art columns focused on the more avant-garde movements, defending and praising radical artistic experiments in form and medium. Its criticism defended intelligence, the free imagination and radical culture against the demands of conformity. The Partisan Review sought an intellectual radicalism with no compromise to rigid formula or ideology. Robert Cantwell wrote to the Partisan Review, praising its critical position: "We have passed the stage of indiscriminating support of writing on the basis of its political and theoretical position." Cantwell called for the Partisan Review to take leadership in the intellectual-literary field and to become the dominant influence in the lives of the serious and sincere artists of the period.<sup>42</sup>

Through its rejection of rigidity and its interest in a wide range of past and present literature, the Partisan Review assumed this dominant position in the minds of many people. Looking back at the career of the Partisan Review in the late 1930s, many speak of the central position the Partisan Review held with those intellectuals concerned with both the social crisis of the depression and the integrity of art. James Gilbert said the Partisan Review was a center in perhaps the most meaningful sense--"as a periodical to which a group of intellectuals contributed their most important work, where ideas were expressed first, and where the problems that confronted intellectuals in literature

and politics were examined."<sup>43</sup> In his study of the 1930s, Richard Pells has pointed to the Partisan Review's emphasis on "values, ideas, and judgments," artistic experimentation, avant-garde culture, and cultural inquiry. Pells saw that the Partisan Review group insisted that intellectual freedom was an absolute prerequisite for the construction of an intelligent and humane socialist society.<sup>44</sup>

In his article "Partisan Review: Phoenix or Dodo?", Leslie Fiedler explored the Partisan Review of the 1930s and emphasized its central position to an entire group of urban intellectuals who came of age during the depression, discovered the world of the imagination and culture, looked toward European art and culture for ideas, were influenced by Marx, and "who wanted desperately to feel that the struggle for a revolutionary politics and the highest literary standards was a single struggle." Fiedler confessed that when thinking about the Partisan Review he often forgot whether he was writing about himself and his friends or that key magazine of the late 1930s. The Partisan Review's birth in the Reed Club and its later independence from politics were typical of the decade, Fiedler said. Despite its emphasis on artistic freedom, the Partisan Review critics from Wilson to Lionel Trilling continued to link art to the social setting and the magazine insisted on political relevance of art. Fiedler saw that the Partisan Review sought a middle ground between pure art and art dedicated by a specific ideology. Finally, Fiedler



answered his own titular question by insisting that despite many shortcomings, the Partisan Review was our only true long lasting and influential journalistic phoenix.<sup>45</sup>

Norman Podhoretz too spoke of the wide-spread influence of the Partisan Review in the late 1930s. Its characteristic elements--the schooling in Marxism and the consequent tendency to view art in a historical and sociological context, the insistence on independence of the imagination, the break with Stalinism, the fascination with modernism and the belief in the importance of intellectual culture--helped a great deal in defining the American intellectual establishment of the 1930s. Podhoretz said that the Partisan Review was the mother of the New York intellectual establishment. At the peak of its influence, in the late thirties, he saw it as an anti-Stalinist, pro-revolutionary, pro-autonomy of culture, pro-European modernist literary journal.<sup>46</sup>

Irving Howe also recognized the influence of the Partisan Review and pointed to it as a significant, innovating force. He felt that the Partisan Review of the 1930s published work of significant and lasting value and succeeded in helping to shape the intellectual temper of the time. The radicalism of the Partisan Review, Howe said, was fertile and alive. The journal offered an attractive combination of system and independence, a new sensibility that was a combination of radicalism and admiration of serious art.<sup>47</sup>

In looking back at the Partisan Review of the 1930s, both William Phillips and Philip Rahv spoke of similar qualities that made it such an influential and significant journal. Thirty years after the depression Phillips was able to sum up the entire dilemma of the radical intellectual in the depression. In one way or another, Phillips said, the communist party seemed to be a bad influence both organizationally and ideologically. Yet at the same time the party provided a central unifying force and an effective outlet for radical social concern: "The question seemed to be," Phillips said, "to what extent would it be desirable to cooperate and suppress some of our critical sense, some of our critical feelings, in the name of some larger cause?" Phillips was frank about the complexities of this dilemma. He had mixed feelings about writers engaging in politics. He felt that writers, including himself, were often stupid about politics; they joined the wrong parties and signed the wrong petitions. But, Phillips asked, "where else is this sort of free-lance, uncommitted or unfettered conscience or consciousness going to come from?" Phillips felt the writer had an essential role to play in the social life of a nation: "I don't know, maybe we just have to be both stupid and morally responsible."<sup>48</sup>

Phillips found an answer to this dilemma in the development of the Partisan Review. Despite the centrality and relevance of orthodox radical politics to the economic crisis, Phillips said that there was still something alien

and inauthentic in the crude and sectarian form into which Marxist ideas had been squeezed by the communist party during Stalin's leadership. In retrospect, Phillips pointed out that the true revolutionary position was the free position and the Soviet position ultimately served bureaucratic and dictatorial ends. Phillips developed a position that united both radical social concern and imaginative freedom in literature. "Such a position," Phillips said, "really amounted to a complete break with the communists." This break was implicit in the Partisan Review all along, Phillips insisted, for the Partisan Review felt that for literature to be really radical it could not be rigidly tied to politics. Phillips charged the party with anti-intellectualism; he said that behind their crude esthetics lay the single question of political power. "As I see it," Phillips said in looking back, "this was the conflict on the left in the 1930s: the conflict between a free-floating radical spirit and a historical force that both channeled it and throttled it."<sup>49</sup>

This free-floating radical spirit was central to the Partisan Review of the 30s, as both Phillips and Rahv noted in a preface to a later collection of the journal's fiction. They said that their quarrel with the communists originated in a protest against the "official idea of art as an instrument of political propaganda." They used Marxism as a method of critical analysis, but they would not condone official party direction of literary art. They said that

the Partisan Review resisted the debasement of writing they saw inherent in a rigid political affiliation.<sup>50</sup>

Both spoke with pride of the journal's longevity, its steady growth, and its influence. They felt that this success was the result of a "consistent...editorial temper, an approach or characterisitic emphasis" in the journal. They stated that their policy had always been to unite the sensibility of art and the more rational intelligence that goes into social thinking. They saw their ideal reader as one who was receptive to new experiments in fiction and poetry while also being concerned with the structure and fate of modern society. They felt that the Partisan Review had always had a strong interest in politics, but not in any narrow sense. The two guiding editors of the journal asserted that "true artists will not succumb to the tensions of the age but will master them in the course of their struggle to give meaning to our experience."<sup>51</sup>

## CHAPTER V: THE PARTISAN REVIEW: ITS FICTIONAL LEGACY

Action is with the scholar subordinate, but it is essential. Without it, he is not yet man. Without it, thought can never ripen into truth....It is the raw material out of which the intellect moulds her splendid products. A strange process too, this, by which experience is converted into thought, as a mulberry leaf is converted into satin. The manufacture goes forward at all hours.

Emerson, The American Scholar

The trouble is that writers are too literary--too damn literary....Art for art's sake: think of it--art for art's sake. Let a man really accept that--let that really be his ruling--and he is lost.... Instead of regarding literature as...an instrument, in the service of something larger than itself, it looks upon itself as an end--as a fact to be finally worshipped, adored. To me that's all a horrible blasphemy.

Walt Whitman

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The fictional legacy of the Partisan Review of the 1930s reflects the journal's critical insistence that art remain imaginatively free while dealing with social reality; artists drawn to the journal were attempting to master the tensions of the age. They sought to give artistic meaning to experience rather than to present a patent ideology. The work published in the Partisan Review during the decade was a considerable body of fiction notable for both its imaginative variety and social vision. The abundance of this high quality fiction, combined with the critical integrity of the journal, made the Partisan Review a significant and characteristic voice of the era.

To scan the list of contributors to the Partisan Review is to realize the quality of its offerings. Besides an important core of writers that we will examine in detail, the Partisan Review published poetry by Wallace Stevens, Theodore Roethke, Elizabeth Bishop, Richard Eberhart, Kenneth Patchen, Randall Jarrell, Robert Lowell, John Berryman, and W. H. Auden. E. E. Cummings, poet, iconoclast, enemy of bureaucratic slogan and cliché, outspoken champion of freedom, individualism and imagination, chose the Partisan Review to print his poem "Speech From a Forthcoming Play," an attack on all systems, democratic or communist, which stand in the way of spontaneity. The Partisan Review published contributions from Katherine Anne Porter, Lionel Trilling, Henry Miller, Gertrude Stein, William Carlos Williams, and Sherwood Anderson. There

were selections from European authors like Rimbaud, Kafka, Silone, Malraux, and Dylan Thomas. In the early 1940s the Partisan Review continued to publish notable modern fiction with stories from Saul Bellow, poems from Stevens and Roethke, and articles from George Orwell. T. S. Eliot chose to Partisan Review to introduce two of his Four Quartets in the first years of the new decade.

The Partisan Review brought to its pages a number of authors whose names are not as familiar, but who nonetheless gave quality and character to the journal. In its second issue the young journal presented a story by Tillie Olsen, "The Iron Throat."<sup>1</sup> The story was conceived as the first part of a novel of the 30s which Olsen worked on the the 30s, put aside for decades, and finally put together in 1973 and published as Yonnondio, From the Thirties. She took her final title from a poem by Walt Whitman, whose "Yonnondio" was a lament for the aboriginies, a song, a poem. Olsen's novel is a poem of lament for a family of Wyoming coal miners. She said of the novel that it "bespeaks the consciousness and roots of that decade, if not its events."<sup>2</sup> The social realities are ever-present in the novel. The poverty, the hunger, and the danger involved in mining the coal--"coal, it oughta be red, and let people see how they get it with blood"--pervade the story of one family's attempt to survive. But, as indicated by its title, the novel goes beyond the strong social indictment present in its events to song and poetry.



The novel has received high praise for its depth, vibrancy, compassion, vividness, genius, emotional power, and above all for its language.<sup>3</sup>

The book is both vividly timely and artistically timeless. The Holbrook family was exposed to brutalizing poverty, hard work, and social injustice: "Earth sucks you in, to spew out the coal, to make a few fat bellies fatter." The entire town lived in a state of fear--"on the women's faces lived the look of listening"--anxious about the whistle that sounds the call of alarm from the mines. The father, Jim Holbrook, was a miner and the pressures of hard work and a hungry family led to his anger, drunkenness, and brutal insensitivity. To escape this misery Jim took his family away to a spring and summer idyll on a farm. But the farm failed and the family ended up in a midwestern city with hard work in the sultry packing houses. Once again they were reduced to bare survival.

The novel is a testimony to this survival and a celebration of the strength of the family. The main character in the novel is Mazie Holbrook, the seven-year-old daughter. Her consciousness is the book's focus, and it is her poetic awareness that controls the novel. "I am a-knowen things," Mazie thinks, "I can diaper a baby. I can tell ghost stories. I know words and words....Sometimes the whistle blows and everyone starts a runnen. Things come a-blowen my hair and it is soft, like the baby laughin." Mazie sees the black horror of the mines, but

her consciousness is not an angry, militant one. We continually view the story through the fresh lyric eyes of a child. Her vision transcends the bitter precocious knowledge of her hungry childhood. She finds strength not in revolutionary consciousness, but in poetic sensation. Sitting next to her mother, Mazie could feel her mother's touch, and this warmth, like many of her childhood sensations, was transforming to Mazie:

The fingers stroked, spun a web, cocooned Mazie into happiness and intactness and selfness. Soft wove the bliss round hurt and fear and want and shame-- the old worn fragile bliss, a new frail selfness bliss, healing, transforming. Up from the grasses from the earth, from the broad tree trunk at their back, latent life streamed and seeded. The air and self shone boundless. Absently, her mother stroked; stroke unfolding, wingedness, boundless.<sup>4</sup>

Tillie Olson contributed another article to the Partisan Review, "The Strike," a report on the events of the 1934 San Francisco longshoremen's strike which erupted into a summer of class-warfare, violence, and death. Olsen, a member of the Young Communist League, was arrested for picketing during the strike and her report communicated the vivid action, bloody violence, and screaming headlines in a breathless, ticker-tape barrage of prose that is striking in its immediacy. This contribution has been praised and anthologized as a notable example of the forceful journalism of the era.<sup>5</sup> Olsen's report was directly from the excitement of the scene: "I am on the battlefield, and the increasing stench and smoke sting the eyes so it is impossible to turn them back into the past....If I could

go away for awhile, if there were time and quiet, perhaps I could do it. All that is happening might resolve into order and sequence, fall into neat patterns of words." The feverish and blurred words seem the perfect medium to present the chaos of an entire city crippled by a general strike and frequent clashes between workers and police.

Olsen did not publish again in the Partisan Review and her subsequent output is very small. But the few stories that have appeared reconfirm her high art and craftsmanship. The four stories collected in Tell Me A Riddle have won numerous awards and praise.<sup>6</sup> The collection displays the probing insight, poetry of language, and emotional power so prominent in Yonnondio. Olsen's characters are all presented in their multiple complexities; they are living, memorable creations. They have working-class backgrounds, but her portrayals go beyond the abuses of class to reveal inner longings, strengths, and beauty.

Alfred Hayes is another writer who can be discovered in the Partisan Review. Hayes appeared in a number of issues of the early Partisan Review and his work has been highly regarded for its sensitive portrayal of the depression generation.<sup>7</sup> Hayes was a poet and writer from the Reed Club of New York and an editor of the Partisan Review. He addressed the second national conference of John Reed Clubs and insisted that the radical cultural movement must not demand rigid ideological orthodoxy of its members.<sup>8</sup> His contributions to the Partisan Review illustrate his intense, yet independent, response to the 30s. Hayes

appeared in the first issue of Partisan Review with the poem "In a Coffee Pot" which focused on the bitter brooding men of the depression. These men were not merely masses in an endless line; Hayes gave them individuality. There was the wise guy, the recent college grad, the angry man, the disillusioned man. Hayes conveyed a sense of an entire generation reading want ads, waiting in lines, on the bum: "What shall we do? Turn on the gas?/ Jump a bridge? Boxcar west?/...Shall we squat out our days in agencies?/ Or peddling socks, shoelaces, ties?/ We wrench green grassblades with sudden hands." There is detailed here not only the dead cigars, skipped meals, and cold nickles for subway fare, but also a growing bitterness and anger. The poem is not a militant assertion of imminent revolution, but rather a vivid reminder that men do not wait forever.<sup>9</sup>

Hayes published the short story, "Johnny" in the Partisan Review. The title character is a fully drawn German immigrant who works as a baker and dishwasher, plays accordian, relives his days of glory as an army officer, and tells humorous stories poking fun at the wealthy. Johnny was constantly dreaming about going back to Europe to his wife and family. A cut thumb brought a serious infection and Johnny was more worried about his job than his own health. The story is a statement of a workingman's fear for his job made in concrete, vivid terms without reliance on political rhetoric.<sup>10</sup> In the poem "Port of New York" Hayes skillfully contrasts the myth

of New York, the "bellhops and brilliance," with the depression reality of "bank failures and breadlines." This theme is a prominent one among 30s artists, photographers, and fiction writers; Hayes crafted his statement by presenting a foreign visitor to the city who hears the barker's grand description of each famous sight. But the poet vividly presents the opium holes, sweatshops, and ghettos. As the sight-seeing tour progresses the coming night reveals the city's shadowy underside.<sup>11</sup>

In "I Have Inherited No Country House" Hayes again presents a skillful variation of a theme characteristic of the era, the protest against anonymity. In focusing on the disinherited and the bottom dogs, the depression writers opened up new subject areas for writers. Hayes brings the reader's attention to the many without inheritance, who keep no mistresses and are never mentioned in the newspapers. The details of the lives reveal many small catastrophes. Again Hayes warns that this anonymity will bring a legacy of bitterness and anger.<sup>12</sup>

Meridel Le Seur, the writer whose report on hungry women to the New Masses was attacked by rigid editors, found a more hospitable forum at the Partisan Review. Her short stories had been previously published in a variety of magazines including The Dial, American Mercury, and Scribners. Her contribution to the Partisan Review, "No Wine in His Cart," is a story with a wealthy Jamesian setting. The story probes deeply into a woman's marriage

to a wealthy man. Despite the handsome lawn, tennis court, and lake, the woman came to realize that there was a prevailing sterility to the estate. This realization is presented through contrasting symbols; for example the fishless lake is juxtaposed with the vitality of a workman's tools. The woman yearned for contact with health, labor, and warm physican sensation. Her husband had been too busy managing money and his body had grown pale, useless. There was talk of a strike at his company, but the real subject of the story is the wife's growing realization of a sterile marriage: "The perfect husband, she thought, he is the perfect husband and no husband at all. In the heavy summer stillness it was as if her mind had shouted this and she waited to be shot for treason but the world did not shift nor move, the furry hills, tawny, curved, arched towards the sun."<sup>13</sup>

Like Meridel Le Seur, Albert Halper had been abused in the pages of New Masses. Refusing to limit his fiction to formula pronouncements about the lower working class, Halper, like Le Seur, found radical potential in focusing on subjects drawn from different settings. In a Partisan Review offering "They Do the Same in England" Halper looked at the reality behind the glitter of a middle-class dance in England. He found that the tuxedos were rented, the participants were necessarily frugal, and many were dissatisfied with their jobs and prospects. Slowly, as the dance progressed, the veil of success was pierced as the narrator listened in on the many conversations.<sup>14</sup>

Josephine Herbst, the author of the Rope of Gold trilogy, also found social relevance in a wide range of fictional subjects. She insisted that the revolutionary literary movement must be an intelligent, diverse movement rooted in the best of the American tradition. Radical authors could not afford to dismiss entire areas of experience, Herbst said, for "all of the qualities that we term 'American' are rich and useful--the marvelous idiom and the variegated pattern of events almost overpowering in their diversity."<sup>15</sup> Her first Partisan Review entry was "The Golden Harvest," a dissection of the frustrated impulses and despair of a small village. Beneath the gossip and the fetish with house painting there lay the background of difficult farmwork, poor land, and failure. Because the farms would no longer support the families, the young went reluctantly to the paper and pulp mills across the river. The farm life was given up for the village. One sharply drawn character stands out in this story, Fred Riegel, the village eccentric. He too found farming too difficult, but he would not succumb to the drudgery of the mills. He spent his life pursuing the American dream through a series of schemes. He raised rabbits, grew mushrooms, and tried to marry a rich woman. All failed. Fred fell victim to every advertisement and guarantee. Through the vividly realized setting and characterization the story presents an exposure of widespread societal fraud.<sup>16</sup>

In "The Enemy" Herbst looked to Cuba for her setting. Her main character here was a woman journalist in Cuba to

investigate oppression in the sugar industry. The story is an exciting one, for Mrs. Lydney, the journalist, was followed by suspicious Cuban authorities and often endangered by indiscriminate revolutionary violence. Adding to the complexity is her memory of a recent marital breakup due to her political involvement. She deeply regrets the loss of her husband. Revolutionary commitment is presented not as romantic marching but as a difficult and dangerous move. Mrs. Lydney is shown to be very strong at times, and at other times she is reduced to tears.<sup>17</sup>

Richard Wright contributed a striking poem to the early Partisan Review, "Between the World and Me." Of most immediate impact are the sharp details of a lynching that the speaker stumbles upon, the bones and ashes and charred wreckage of human life:

A vacant shoe, an empty tie, a ripped shirt, a lonely  
hat, and/ a pair of trousers stiff with black blood./  
And upon the trampled grass were buttons, dead  
matches,/ Butt-ends of cigars and cigarettes,  
peanut shells, a drained/ gin flask, and a whore's  
lipstick.

The lingering smell of gasoline, the eye sockets of a stoney skull and the other details of the horrible theatre make the poem unforgettable; but it is the effect of this discovery on the speaker that is the poem's true subject. The speaker was not moved to immediate class consciousness and revolutionary gesture; he was shaken instead by the deeper, more human power of fear. As the day passed, the speaker felt the night breeze animate the scene, heard yelping hounds and thirsty voices. The gray ashes entered



his flesh and as the gin flask was once more passed around, "a thousand faces swirled around me, clamoring that my life be burned." He imagined his own immolation.<sup>18</sup>

The slaughter of innocence was also the subject of a Partisan Review poem by Delmore Schwartz who viewed the ominous signs of a coming war in terms of another crucifixion.<sup>19</sup> Schwartz also contributed important and influential short stories to the Partisan Review in the 30s. In these early stories Schwartz showed such artistry that many critics, including T. S. Eliot, praised his brilliance. Schwartz became quickly famous in literary circles largely as a result of his Partisan Review contributions. By the end of Schwartz's career he had been reduced to poverty and drunkenness. Saul Bellow saw a parable of the difficulty of being an artist in America in Schwartz's life and recently wrote Humbolt's Gift with Schwartz in mind.<sup>20</sup> Schwartz first appeared in the Partisan Review with the powerful story "In Dreams Begin Responsibilities." Dwight MacDonald, an editor of the Partisan Review, called this story a "Freudian movie" and it does indeed move beyond a presentation of the difficult life of Jewish immigrants, the common theme of immigrant fiction, to a complex presentation of the psychological state of second generation Jews. The story begins with the narrator seated in a motion picture theatre viewing an old silent picture. As the narrator began to relax, he realized he was watching the story of his parent's courtship. He became anxious but

soon lost himself in the clicking frames of a Sunday in 1909. He saw his father lie about his financial situation to enhance the courtship. He watched a date at Coney Island, a merry-go-round ride, an expensive dinner, and a hopeful conversation about a glorious future. He cried in the theatre. As he father proposed to his mother he stood up and shouted "Don't do it! Its not too late to change your minds, both of you. Nothing will come of it, only remorse, hatred, scandal, and two children whose characters are monstrous." When the usher removed him from the theatre he woke up "into the bleak winter morning of my twenty-first birthday, the window-sill shining with its lip of snow and the morning already begun." Throughout the story there is a brilliant double vision. We are aware of both the vivid 1909 courtship and the narrator's sadness and anxiety.<sup>21</sup> The story was highly praised and it has been credited with introducing a new vision of Jewish life into American literature that would be picked up by many authors in the later flowering of Jewish-American fiction.<sup>22</sup>

This sampling of high quality writing from the Partisan Review could continue, for the journal was packed with notable work dealing with the social concerns of the era in a variety of imaginative ways. But it would be more insightful to turn now to the fictional backbone of the journal, that core of distinguished writers who contributed often to the Partisan Review. Despite their

differences, these writers insisted on social relevance and artistic integrity in their work. Nelson Algren, called "the poet of the Chicago slums" by Malcolm Cowley and "one of the greatest writers" by Ernest Hemingway, contributed many vivid short stories to the Partisan Review in the 1930s. His subjects were the dispossessed people of the depression. In an introduction to a collection of these stories, Algren explained that his concern with these people was a deeply personal matter: "Here, among West Division Street drinkers I felt that, did I deny them, I denied myself." Algren insisted that the writer's task was always "to reveal the way things are with us--be it horrors or joys" and so he turned the attention of his hard, exact prose toward the lost people of the depression.<sup>23</sup>

Like Edward Dahlberg's characters, Algren's bottom-dogs defy the fictional formulas devised by militant Marxist critics. Algren's major work of the 30s, Somebody in Boots, is the story of Cass McKay, a homeless wanderer exposed to the worst that society has to offer. Algren drew much of the material from his own experiences on the bum in the Southwest and he refused to shape his main character into conformity with stereotypes of the virtuous class-conscious proletarian.<sup>24</sup> The novel reveals the abuses of society and each chapter has epigraphs from the Communist Manifesto, but there is little militancy in McKay's bleak life. He grew up in a disgusting Texas border town and left on the road as soon as possible. Here he was beaten and jailed.

Cass was entirely separated from others, sharing only an occasional cigarette and a few mumbled words. He completely jettisoned middle-class values but did not replace them with any system other than animal survival. There was no solidarity, only fear, suspicion, and hatred in Cass's life. He saw many other men in this jungle of motion and isolation and all were broken, unable to channel their thirst and hunger into revolutionary action. For a brief spell in Chicago Cass lived with a Negro prostitute, the communist Norah. She gave him love and attempted to give him a radical economic theory, but Cass never really saw the systematic basis for his experience. A former friend beat Cass for living with a Negro and Cass soon left Norah and continued his sordid, directionless wandering. The novel recreates violence, depravity, and abuse; it does not preach ideology.

Philip Rahv reviewed Somebody in Boots in the Partisan Review and said that left critics should note the novel, but he realized that some would fail to notice it because of their narrowness. Rahv said the novel avoided rhetoric and created a fictional experience that correlated to real social phenomena. Rahv praised this "first complete portrait of the lumpenproletariat in American revolutionary literature"; he saw great realism in this portrayal of boxcar existence, in the creation of Cass McKay's life ("a dark journey of pain and evil"), and in the narrative of men and women "forever mutilated, forever

damned." He said the book was authentically American and felt it should be required reading. Rahv was aware of the revolutionary potential implicit in the book's truthful realism.<sup>25</sup>

This brutal realism and avoidance of overt message characterize Algren's offering to the Partisan Review. In "Storm in Texas" Algren creates the vivid atmosphere of an approaching storm and parallels this with the growing unrest of the people. We are shown a series of hot August days in Texas beginning with the blood-red morning sun rise. This sun soon withered the cotton but did little to discourage the blood-fat green bottle flies that torture the cattle. These monotonous days were followed by night with its hot, foolish small breeze that would

come skipping and hissing out of the east, running like an evil little buffoon from doorstep to doorstep, as though to tell those within of the coming of rain; but everybody knew the small breeze lied.....So it would whisper away to the west, like a cat racing out from under a henhouse with feathers in its fur.

Day followed day with the everpresent threatening yellow sky, rumors of a storm and talk of restless dissatisfaction. In a scene that is typical of Algren, the barely suppressed hunger and violence of the people burst to the surface for a short spree when a box-car loaded with sheep de-railed and burned; the people rushed to the wreckage and ate the smoldering meat. There is little character development here, for the story's main task is the creation of a waiting atmosphere, a tenuous stasis when everything seems to

be holding its breath for the oncoming storm. Subtly, the rumors of hot winds from the west begin to seem like ominous threats for the future.<sup>26</sup>

In "A Place to Lie Down" Algren peoples this Texas setting with two of his loathsome but memorable characters. Mack, a black man, and Tex, a white bum, wander aimlessly around Texas and Algren never fails to detail the squalor of the surroundings. Beyond the disgusting details of the setting, Algren draws an uncomplimentary and unromantic picture of the characters who inhabit this sordid landscape. Algren seems to know all too well that hunger, dirt, and pain weaken and destroy humanity rather than build revolutionary movements. When Mack was brutally beaten by the cops Tex did not go to his aid; rather, Tex was quick to point out to the cops that "Ah aint no nigger." Tex was motivated by personal survival, not solidarity with his black comrade.<sup>27</sup>

Algren provides the obsequies for an entire generation of these disinherited in "American Obituary." Algren's America is "a long dust road leading nowhere"; his indictment of the system springs from the painful details of life on this aimless road rather than from a prophecy of some glorious future. Here a generation is shown to be forgotten and dying rather than being reborn in revolution. The narrator views Frank Mears, address unknown, cause of death unknown, in his box at the morgue: "This is the American thing, the unknown death in the heat of

midday, and the country boy in the long ice-box." The narrator expands his vision to encompass a collage of details that make up this American tragedy. The country boys are lured to the city without suspecting the violence beneath the glitter. They are in their early 20s, unemployed, and they wander from Council Bluffs, from Sangamon County and countless other small towns. They find nothing in the city. The lies lead only to an early unnoticed death.<sup>28</sup>

Algren noticed the deaths and it is to his credit that he unflinchingly recorded the details of a generation on the bum. Algren's early experiences convinced him that he must re-create what he had seen while wandering across America. "All these scenes," Algren confessed, "piled up into something that made me not just want to write, but to really say it, to find out that this thing was all upside down. Everything I'd been told was wrong." In his autobiographical conversations Algren revealed his desire to write the radical truth about American society without sacrificing his independence and integrity as a writer. Algren came to realize that the American myth of strive and succeed was not what America really was about in the 1930s. "I'd been lied to," Algren said. Despite the realization of these lies, Algren did not officially join the communist party. He worked for them and "went into the communist movement" like the rest of his friends. He belonged to a writer's organization that was communist

backed and believed that the party was right on many issues. But, Algren said, he saw "a certain kind of rigidity and a kind of authoritarian attitude toward people in the party and so he kept his distance. Algren was not willing to be "at anybody's behest" so he moved away from the official party and concentrated on his writing. "I deal in facts man," Algren said in characterizing his writing, "The hard terrible facts, the iron truth."<sup>29</sup> Algren presented this individually discovered truth, however hard and terrible, in his Partisan Review short stories.

John Dos Passos, another frequent figure in the Partisan Review, combined Algren's truthful portrayal of human defeat with a poet's sensibility and a radical historian's view of sweeping events. Dos Passos was exposed to imagism, aestheticism, and various forms of modernism in his studies at Harvard with the class of 1916. This interest in art became thematic material for his first two novels, as Dos Passos focused on the conflict between the artist and the larger society. One Man's Initiation (1920) introduced Martin Howe, an aloof, brooding artist alienated from the stupidities of government and the cant of bureaucracy. This conflict between the vulnerable individual and the insensitive large society became Dos Passos' perennial subject. Here Howe rebelled against the army not in order to establish a more humane system, but so that he could retreat into his remote world of gothic cathedrals and medieval art. Three Soldiers (1921)



again introduced an artist as a central character, the Harvard trained musician John Andrews. Again the sweeping impersonality of the A. E. F. threatened to annihilate the sensitive individual. Andrews could not tolerate the fatigue, bugles, and bad taste of the army. He was not looking for a better society; he wanted out of the army so that he could practice his music. In Manhattan Transfer (1925) Dos Passos used the city of New York as the larger threat to individuality. Dos Passos portrayed a dozen characters, all defeated. At the novel's end Jimmy Herf wanders aimlessly, a victim of society rather than a militant enemy of society.

The Sacco-Vanzetti case in which two Italian anarchists were executed in a climate which owed more to anti-radical hysteria than justice, seemed like material from a Dos Passos novel. Here two individuals were crushed by the forces of the larger society. Dos Passos was deeply involved with the case, and its final tragic conclusion proved to be the impetus for one of the monumental works of the 30s, Dos Passos' U.S.A. trilogy. Here Dos Passos drew the full radical implications from his theme of the individual versus society, although he avoided militant formula. With his great technical skill as a novelist he was able to synthesize sweeping headlines, historical biographies, his own movement toward radical concern, and the fictional lives of dozens of characters into a tragic work critical of all institutions, capitalist

or socialist, that disregarded the common man. Dos Passos began and ended the trilogy with his typical character, the isolated individual disregarded by society. The first fictional character introduced was Fainy McCreary, Mac, who grew up midst industrial stench, anti-Irish prejudice, the turmoil of strikes and other threatening manifestations of modern American society. Mac, like many of Dos Passos' characters, wandered aimlessly from coast to coast. He was a Wobbly for awhile, but the lure of women and the comfort of domestic life undermined his radical intentions. The trilogy ended with the portrait of another wanderer, the vagabond, alone, hungry and defeated on the far stretching American highway.

Mac once heard his uncle Tim tell his father that

It ain't your fault and it ain't my fault....it's the fault of poverty, and poverty's the fault of the system....It's the fault of the system that don't give a man the fruit of his labor....The only man that gets anything out of capitalism is a crook, an' he gets to be a millionaire in short order....But an honest workman can work a hundred years and not leave enough to bury him decent with....It's the system, John, it's the goddam lousy system.<sup>30</sup>

The whole scheme of the novel reinforced Uncle Tim's radical analysis. Dos Passos' heroes were the historical figures portrayed in the biographies who fought the evils of capitalism: Eugene Debs and Bill Haywood, labor organizers; Bob LaFollette, the rebel Wisconsin senator who fought big business; John Reed, full of life, poetry, and radicalism; Paxton Hibben, the crusading journalist who exposed the horror of war and class abuse; Joe Hill, the Wobbly poet;

Isadora Duncan, the iconoclastic dancer who could find no freedom for her art in America; Thorstein Veblen, a major influence on Dos Passos, a radical intellectual who dissected American customs and institutions with a keen, satirical scapel. Veblen, much like Dos Passos, was consumed by a passion to explore the bureaucratic machinery that crushed individual freedom.

Likewise, the real villains in the novel were those powerful historical figures who controlled vast segments of society and who disregarded the individual in their quest for power: Minor C. Keith, the man behind the United Fruit Company who smelled money in South America and was determined to make a profit regardless of the consequences; Andrew Carnegie, the baron of iron, steel, and oil industries, the philanthropist who gave money to promote universal peace "always, except in time of war"; Woodrow Wilson, the preacher of peace who prepared for war, the liberal who brought heavy repression to the country; and J. P. Morgan who grew wealthy and fat on panics, starvation, wars, and bankruptcies.

As the biographies exposed the outstanding historical heroes and villains, the introspective Camera's Eye sections revealed the author's growing realization of the corrupt system. In brilliant poetic-impressionistic sketches Dos Passos presented the vivid moments of his own biography that informed his vision of society. Central among those experiences was the Sacco-Vanzetti

episode. Here Dos Passos became intensely aware of the makeup of American capitalist society. He found it to be a divided nation:

They have clubbed us off the streets--they are stronger--they are rich--they hire and fire the politicians the newspaper editors the old judges the small men with reputations the college presidents the wardheelers....all right you have won.... America our nation has been beaten by strangers who have turned our language inside out who have taken the clean words our fathers spoke and made them slimy and foul....they have built the electric-chair and hired the executioner to throw the switch--all right we are two nations...We stand defeated America.<sup>31</sup>

Despite this radical analysis that provided a framework for the trilogy, Dos Passos voiced no call for a socialist system. There is no overt revolutionary gesture in U.S.A. nor does the trilogy end in revolutionary elan. The radical analysis of the divided nation is still vividly present in the trilogy's concluding sketch of the vagabond. As the vag stands on the lost highway with his empty belly, torn clothing, aching feet, and his memories of the transient camps, jails, and general abuse, an airliner soars above him with its businessmen and their bank accounts, mistresses, contracts, profits, and steak-filled bellies. But the vagabond is going nowhere. He is conscious only of his appetite. He stands in defeat. The fictional characters throughout the trilogy reinforce this tragic theme of defeat. All of them, poor or wealthy, find very little that fulfills them. They drift, lured by sex and money. But they all go down to defeat. This indictment of society is not followed by a stock plea

for a socialist future, for Dos Passos seems equally suspicious of radical alternatives. The historical radical heroes in the trilogy too end in defeat; they are sold-out by the others in the movement. Debs is betrayed and deserted, Big Bill Haywood is broken in prison, Veblen is scorned by all. The radicals in the fictional narrative are equally lost. Dick Savage, like Mac, sells out in the end. Ben Compton and Mary French are admirable in their social concern, but the radical movement smothers their individuality, love, and human warmth.

Dos Passos created a great novel of technical brilliance, sweeping scope, and radical historical vision. But at its center was not a strict Marxist scheme but rather a tragic sense of the individual's inability to fulfill himself in any vast impersonal bureaucracy, capitalist or communist. The success of the trilogy and its underlying pessimism were noted by many of Dos Passos' contemporaries. Malcolm Cowley reviewed U.S.A. and noted its scope and richness; but he also pointed to the novel's failure to express struggle, comradeship, and growing political consciousness.<sup>32</sup> Edmund Wilson called Dos Passos a first rate writer and one of the few writers able to control a systematic study of many aspects of America and integrate these aspects into a sensible picture. "It is Dos Passos' relentless reiteration of his conviction that there is something lacking, something wrong, in America," Wilson said, "as well as his insistence on the

importance of America--that gives his work its validity and power." Wilson too noted that in the work of Dos Passos everybody loses out.<sup>33</sup> Lionel Trilling wrote an insightful analysis of Dos Passos in the Partisan Review, calling U.S.A. the single most important and satisfying novel of the decade. Trilling praised Dos Passos' criticism of the prevailing system. He pointed out that Dos Passos was not at all assured of the eventual triumph of good; Dos Passos had no faith in any party or system, Trilling noted, and saw corruption on the left as well as greed in the established order. But, Trilling argued, this skepticism was not necessarily harmful or politically negative. Dos Passos was not concerned with an easily defined class struggle; he was more concerned with deeper internal struggles. Dos Passos, Trilling said, had written a highly moral trilogy despite its pessimism.<sup>34</sup>

Dos Passos's tragic vision was an aspect of his radicalism that separated him from the orthodox communists. His radicalism was centered in his sympathy for the individual and his distrust of all systems. It was this sympathy that brought Dos Passos to do political work for the Harlan coal miners and Sacco and Vanzetti. In a Partisan Review symposium Dos Passos said "my sympathies lie with the private in the front line against the brass hat...with the criminal against the cop."<sup>35</sup> Despite, then, his radical hatred of capitalist oppression, Dos Passos also feared Stalinist bureaucracy. Like his much admired Veblen, Dos Passos put the acid test to existing

institutions but was unable to say yes to any alternative system. As Alfred Kazin has pointed out, Dos Passos was constitutionally a rebel and an outsider; he was more interested in saving an individual from all society than in establishing him in a new society.<sup>36</sup> His was an extreme radical protest, suspicious of all power over individual choice.

Another aspect of Dos Passos's independent radicalism was his determination to keep revolutionary art free of dogma and control. In a symposium in Modern Quarterly in 1932, Dos Passos asserted his conviction that capitalism had failed and would collapse. He felt that the writer must participate in the ensuing social crisis, standing beside the workers. But when asked about the relationship between a writer's work and radical party politics, Dos Passos answered that a writer's art is "his own goddam business." He said he was by temperament a campfollower and not a party member and added "I don't see how a novelist...could be a party member under present conditions." The symposium turned to the question of literary tradition and Dos Passos took his stance with those who insisted on learning from the past. He praised Dreiser, London, Anderson and said "it seems to me that Walt Whitman's a hell of a lot more revolutionary than any Russian poet I've ever heard of." Dos Passos said that Marxists who were attempting to junk the American tradition were "just cutting themselves off from the

continent....Good writing was good writing under Moses and the Pharaohs and will be good writing under a soviet republic or a money oligarchy, and until the human race stops making speech permanent in print."<sup>37</sup>

Dos Passos attempted to define the elements of this good writing in his address to the first Writers Congress on "The Writer as Technician." He argued that good writing was much more than merely putting words down on paper. He felt that in these chaotic times good writing must involve "discovery, originality, invention." Dos Passos called strongly for freedom in art for a man could not discover, originate, or invent anything without freedom. Dos Passos recognized that in the face of the conflicting pulls of organized life maintaining one's artistic freedom demanded "a certain amount of nerve." But he insisted that for a writer to be a good craftsman, a capable technician, he must be free to create bold, original thought. Dos Passos said that this bold, free, original thought was needed more than ever. The writer should take part in the social conflict against oppression, but he should strive to create meaningful art and not to become a political figurehead. Dos Passos pinpointed his relationship to organized radical politics precisely when he said:

There is no escaping the fact that if you are a writer you are dealing with the humanities, with the language of all the men of your speech of your generation, with their traditions of the past and their feelings and preceptions. 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; and that you are on the side, not with phrases and opinions, but really and truly, of liberty, fraternity, and humanity.<sup>38</sup>

Placing himself on the side of individual liberty and against phrases, contraptions, and organizations, Dos Passos was naturally drawn to the Partisan Review. His first fictional contribution to the journal was the story "Grade Crossing," an excerpt from Big Money. The focus was on Charley Anderson, one of the main fictional characters of the last novel in the trilogy, who rose successfully in the boom of the 1920s but was unable to find contentment. Here were detailed Anderson's aimless motion, carelessness, and disrespect for others. Anderson bought and sold women, raced recklessly in fast cars, bragged about his business adventures, and felt the emptiness of his monetary success.<sup>39</sup>

A more socially conscious fictional character from Big Money was the focus of "Gus," a later Dos Passos contribution to the Partisan Review. In this excerpt from the trilogy we witness the radicalization of Mary French, a social worker-journalist who worked with the steel workers in Pittsburgh. Her newspaper assignment was to find and report on the Russian conspiracy in growing labor unrest; Mary could find no conspiracy other than the

widespread oppression of the workers. Through Mary's observations, Dos Passos skillfully and vividly presented the details of hard work and poverty, the worn hands, dirty aprons, fearful eyes, bare black slagpiles, jumbled shanties, drying diapers, and stench of cooking cabbage. Mary did not uncover a Red plot; rather she grew to understand the reasons for labor protest. But as her knowledge grew, so did her unhappiness. She became haggard and desperate. The workers in the sketch were shown to be divided and beaten; the strike that finally came was lost. Mary was left with little but exhaustion and despair.<sup>40</sup>

The defeat of a working man is the subject of "The Migratory Worker," another Dos Passos contribution to the Partisan Review. Here is presented the saga of another typical Dos Passos character, Ike Hall. Hall's early life was a blend of fast women, faster freights, Bull Durham tobacco and pick-and-shovel work. He fell in love with the brown eyes and brown curls of Jinny Connor, married, and moved to Kansas City. Life for them there was a succession of bad rooms and even worse jobs. Jinny became pregnant; with no money and no friends Ike was forced to take a job as a scab. Ike felt worse than ever; he took the job, tore up his old red card, and cried. Revolutionary idealism was no match for desperate need.<sup>41</sup>

The Partisan Review also excerpted selections from Dos Passos Adventures of a Young Man, a work that focused not primarily on the failure of capitalism, as did the

U.S.A. trilogy, but on the failure of Stalinist communism.<sup>42</sup> Here Dos Passos's individual is defeated not by the failure of the American system, but by the rigidity of the radical movement. The novel is the story of Glen Spotswood, a radical who became disillusioned with the communist party and finally died in the Spanish Civil War, a victim of radical factionalism and ineptness. As the Partisan Review was providing a forum for this work, this complete reversal of the rigid formula of socialist realism drew fire from the New Masses, which attacked the book as "reactionary" and "retrograde."<sup>43</sup>

Indeed, the career of Dos Passos in the 1930s parallels the course of the Partisan Review journal in its movement away from the New Masses to a position of independence. Dos Passos was listed on the executive board of the first issue of New Masses in May, 1926. Dos Passos played an important role in the early flexible period of the New Masses as a contributor. In an early issue of the New Masses Dos Passos wrote on the Sacco and Vanzetti case and revealed the major concerns of his work. He pictured the villain here as the judicial bureaucracy, the world of phrases, evidence, motions and the tight, sticky spiderweb filaments of the law. Dos Passos presented Sacco as a Kafkaesque victim:

All the moves in the game are made for him, all he can do is sit helpless and wait, fastening his hopes on one set of phrases after another. In all these lawbooks, in all this terminology of clerks of the court and counsel for the defense there is one move that will save him, out of a million that will mean death.

Dos Passos presented the victims as individuals in the midst of an impersonal machine. In a chilling summary of his own vision and the plight of Sacco and Vanzetti, Dos spoke of the slow, daily movement toward defeat as the two men felt themselves "being inexorably pushed toward the chair... by the superhuman involved stealthy soulless mechanism of the law."<sup>44</sup>

In the same issue of the New Masses, Mike Gold reviewed Dos Passos Manhattan Transfer and found it to be brilliant in its depiction of the sights and smells of the city. He found Dos Passos to be a "gorgeous writer," a poet able to capture the sensations of an entire city. But Gold saw in him a troubling "bewilderment"; Gold saw that Dos Passos's heroes were always baffled and defeated, so Gold told Dos Passos to read more history and economics in order to find a more positive direction. Gold said that Dos Passos must ally himself definitely with the radical worker's army in order to escape middle-class bewilderment.<sup>45</sup>

As Gold steered the magazine toward the workers and attempted to dismiss middle class concerns, Dos Passos voiced his realistic appraisal of the writer's task. He wrote in the New Masses that it was the duty of the intellectual to address the middle class. He felt that intellectuals were generally too cowardly and too pre-occupied with making a living to actually join those who were in active rebellion. So intellectuals should present the ideas that, although they don't make events, color

events. Above all, Dos Passos insisted, the intellectual should attempt to humanize the class war.<sup>46</sup>

Dos Passos's conception of the writer's role and his sympathy with the individual victims of all systems soon brought him into conflict with the increasingly rigid direction of the New Masses. Dos Passos supported the communist party candidate for president in 1932, but by early 1934, the year that the Partisan Review began, Dos Passos and others wrote a letter to the party in which they strongly objected to the disruptive action of the party in breaking up a rally of the socialist party in Madison Square Garden, February 16, 1934. They objected to this example of factional warfare that disrupted working-class unity. The letter was not intended to support the socialist party at the expense of the communists; rather it rebuked the communist party for its crudeness and unnecessary sectarianism. The New Masses replied individually to Dos Passos. The New Masses praised Dos Passos's recognition of the evils of capitalism embodied in his literature. They recognized him as a skillful novelist with radical vision. The New Masses said it was sorry to find him disagreeing and criticizing the communist party.<sup>47</sup> The reply to Dos Passos was a mildly worded corrective, but the widening gap between the magazine and the artist was now clear. In the following years of the decade Dos Passos became a frequent target of his former associates at the New Masses.<sup>48</sup>

Granville Hicks, who frequently abused Dos Passos in the New Masses, later looked back on his accomplishments in the 30s. Hicks recognized that Dos Passos was never a member of the communist party but rather a part-time camp-follower. Dos Passos was influenced by the party, but as the decade matured he became disillusioned. Hicks now saw that the direction given to writers by the party was often wrong and short-lived. But, Hicks argued, the impact of the depression itself on writers like Dos Passos was profound: "The turn towards communism was a hasty impulse, soon regretted, but questions had been raised about the character of American life that could not easily be answered." Hicks felt that the radical ferment of the decade added to Dos Passos's great skill as a novelist and produced a trilogy of great power: "If a decade can be said to have a literary expression, U.S.A. is the expression of the thirties."<sup>49</sup>

Another writer central to the Partisan Review, James T. Farrell, produced a trilogy that strongly and skillfully expressed the thirties. Farrell was able to bring so much of the experience of the thirties to his fiction that Alfred Kazin would vividly recall the impact of first reading Farrell's work during the depression: "For the first time I felt that I was in my own world, and that it had expanded into the creative life--suddenly nothing could have seemed better than this." Kazin called Farrell the most powerful naturalist who ever worked in the American tradition.<sup>50</sup>

Farrell's major work during the decade was the Studs Lonigan Trilogy. In explaining how this trilogy was written, Farrell noted that he created the character of Lonigan to embody a number of "tendencies" he saw at work in a section of American life that he knew very well from his own life in Chicago. That is, Farrell began to see Studs "not only as a character for imaginative fiction, but also as a social manifestation."

In creating this imaginative fiction dealing with social realities, Farrell avoided any narrow conception of economic determinism. Farrell insisted that the social milieu he was depicting was one "of spiritual poverty." Farrell was careful to place Studs in a middle class neighborhood several steps removed from the slums and economic want. "Had I written Studs Lonigan as a story of the slums," Farrell said, "it would have been easier for for the reader to place the motivation and causation of the story in immediate economic roots."<sup>51</sup> Such a placing of motivation would have simplified, narrowed, and distorted Farrell's intention of presenting the multiple tendencies at work in an environment of spiritual poverty.

The trilogy covers fifteen years in the life of Studs Lonigan, from his graduation from St. Patrick's Grammar School in 1916 to a day in Aug., 1931, when Studs, not yet thirty, dies in bed. The trilogy is an unforgettable insight into the passage of time as Studs is shown both in his youth, with dreams of future heroism, love,

and success, and approaching middle age, looking back with regret at what might have been. While his thoughts are turning backward, we are presented with the immediate physical reality, the subtle widespread cultural poverty, and the limitations of personality that confine Studs and bring about his tragedy. It was this complex of tendencies, rather than any simple formula, that caused the decline of Studs from the sometimes hero of the Prairie Avenue gang to the trembling, dissolute, dying wreck at the end of the trilogy.

Studs' physical environment is sharply drawn. Farrell knew every gutter, lamppost and fireplug in the Chicago district immediately west of Washington Park. Studs hung out at the L station, Bathcellar's pool hall, the barber shop and the corner of 58th and Prairie. This setting was narrow not only in sharp boundaries of stone and metal, but also in rigid attitudes and ideas. Farrell recreated not only the streets and hangouts he had seen, but also the influential barrage of verbal platitudes he had heard in this neighborhood. Studs was constantly exposed to the songs, headlines, newsreels, homilies, slogans, and sermons that reflected shallow attitudes about work, love, success, and life. These verbal manifestations of spiritual and cultural poverty overwhelm Studs and help lead to his decay.

This constant humming of priestly piety, parental advice, school book wisdom, public values and gang jargon



obscures Studs' own real needs. He is constantly recognizing his emotional desire to experience love and his physical need for healthy habits, but his awareness is not strong enough to combat widespread and everpresent stereotypes. His real needs and his public image of himself are not in harmony. Studs reaches a point of no return as he watches time pass, dreams fade, friends die, and alternatives fade. The pattern of his destiny hardens.

Dying, in a coma, Studs witnesses a grotesque parade of figures that reflect the cultural directives that plagued him: God's voice commands Studs to honor his parents; his mother asks him to be a good boy; a fat priest warns Studs of damnation; a drunken Nun beats him for throwing spitballs; George Washington, in moth-eaten rags, shouts "your country right or wrong"; the Pope, President Wilson, Sergeant Kelly, Father Gilhooly, relatives and friends all dance before Studs with their cliches. Studs dies a victim not simply of an economic system, but of a complex of environment, attitudes, and personality.

This wide vision was recognized by the Partisan Review in its reviews of the trilogy. William Phillips saw Farrell's avoidance of simple economic formula when he said that Farrell "pulls no wires behind the scenes." Phillips praised Farrell's complex presentation of a wide range of social phenomena, the lechery, Sunday School piety, mock-heroic athleticism, and the braggadocio of Studs and his peers.<sup>52</sup> Later the Partisan Review again discussed

the trilogy and defended the lack of radical consciousness in Farrell's characters. Studs and his neighborhood did not revolt or consciously try to change their environment, the journal recognized, because they knew of no creative outlet for their vague desires. What rebellion there was took a destructive form in drinking, fighting and whoring; the Partisan Review saw the truthful realism of Farrell's creation of characters whose complex milieu smothered revolutionary consciousness.<sup>53</sup>

Farrell was active in the Partisan Review both as a contributor of fiction and as the journal's theatre critic. In the first issue of the Partisan Review Farrell contributed an excerpt from the trilogy which focused on the pool room idleness of the young Studs and his gang. The sketch also focused on Studs' father and his platitudes about work.<sup>54</sup> False myths about American life were again the subject of Farrell's second fictional contribution to the journal, the ironically entitled story "Benefits of American Life." Here Farrell contrasted the immigrant dream of America with the reality found upon coming to the "promised land." Takiss Filios, the strong shepherd boy, migrated to America expecting streets of gold; he found only loneliness and a series of deadening jobs. Filios became a professional in the dance marathon, the test of endurance that proved to be an apt metaphor for the endless, repetitive, and painful movement of the decade.<sup>55</sup>

Farrell chose a more wealthy group of Americans in a foreign setting to document in his next Partisan Review

offering. Although they were of a different class, the lives of these rich exiles were no more rewarding than the lives of Farrell's first and second generation immigrants: "They talked on, and drank wine and yawned. And then they talked, and drank coffee and yawned." There is no overt political message, but the insight into the emptiness of these lives is unsettling.<sup>56</sup>

In "Morning with the Family," Farrell presented the hectic hour before work with babies crying, chilly floors, tension and regrets. There was a moment for reflection when Jim, the worker, picked up the baby and thought about its origins in hot desire for his wife, the pain of birth, the growth of the baby, and then the struggle for life in a hard world. Despite the anxiety of the routine before work, Jim and his wife were buoyed by pipe dreams of a better apartment and vague future hopes for a comfortable life.<sup>57</sup> Farrell followed this selection from A World I Never Made with another selection from that novel, "Mrs. O'Flaherty and Liz." Once again a crisis is eased by cliches and stock responses. Mrs. O'Flaherty and her daughter Liz were dealing with the betrayal of another daughter, Margaret, by her wealthy lover. The entire selection is an extended sermon by Liz on the evils of money and the virtue of poverty: "If you are pure and holy and live in the fear of God, all the joys of Heaven will be waiting for you when you die....Jim and I are poor. But we are good. We live in fear of God. We won't be poor up there in the next world."<sup>58</sup>

In "The Only Son" Farrell presented the difficulty of breaking away from the old habits of thought. The setting of the story was Patrick McMurtrie's twenty-first birthday, and beneath the celebration lay the desire of the son to break away from the father's cynicism and the mother's religion.<sup>59</sup> Farrell was honest enough to realize that many met poverty not with revolutionary vision, but with stubborn platitudes.

Simply put, Farrell said that in his fiction he sought the full truth: "I want my writing to have allegiance to what I think is true." He praised the new direction of fiction in the 30s; he was especially pleased with the focus on new material and the radical assessment of the true cost of the American way of life in terms of human frustrations. But Farrell saw a basic inadequacy in some revolutionary fiction. He spoke out against the lack of "internal conviction" in some novels and stories. To be a successful example of radical fiction, Farrell felt, the revolutionary viewpoint must impress the reader as a natural and integral part of the story rather than as a glued on afterthought.<sup>60</sup>

Farrell insisted on truth and organic wholeness in fiction because he had a high regard for the role of literature. Farrell felt that literature arose from a sense of wonder and curiosity about what is happening to ourselves and others: "It is out of this concern with the nature of experiences that novels are conceived and written,"

Farrell said. "We say of novels that they are imaginative means of exploring some aspects of the nature of experience." Farrell saw literature not as illusion or escape, but as imagination working on truth. This imaginative recreation of life's experience could provide the basis for full and rich growth. Serious fiction, Farrell believed, should challenge us with a reality that is often smoothed over and falsified by easy formulas and frozen conventions. Literature humanizes the world and exposes participants to rich segments of living experience. While much of modern life fractures, atomizes, and limits, literature can help us feel more and know more. Literature can help us participate in our own time and culture; it can enlarge, broaden, and expand our experience. For literature to perform this important role, Farrell insisted that it be free: "The freedom of literature is incompatible with political control," Farrell said, "the writer should not serve politics; he should serve the truth."<sup>61</sup>

Paralleling this emphasis on truth, wholeness, richness, and freedom in fiction was Farrell's insistence on integrity in radical criticism. He often joined Phillips and Rahv in denouncing "leftism" in the decade's criticism. Farrell spoke out against the attempt to politicalize literature led by Gold and Hicks. He felt that by turning the true critical spirit into a mass of "political sentimentalities" that modern literature would be poisoned. Literature does not lend itself to over-

politicalized and ideologically schematicized criticism, Farrell insisted. As theatre critic of the Partisan Review, Farrell vowed to view drama honestly, without a heavy-handed political bias: "if criticism and reviewing in the revolutionary cultural movement are going to play their parts properly, critics and reviewers must realize that they cannot have one set of criteria for 'bourgeois' writers and another for their own writers."<sup>62</sup>

This insistence on integrity in criticism led Farrell to write one of the key documents of the decade, A Note on Literary Criticism. The entire work centered on Farrell's notion that literature is both a fine art and an instrument of social influence. In his first chapter Farrell discussed literature as both aesthetic and functional, subjective and objective, elation and pragmatism. This duality led to many critical problems in the thirties. Basically, Farrell sought to overcome these problems by insisting on organic harmony. When the two functions of art were separated the result was oversimplification and distortion. Unfortunately, Farrell said, there were glaring examples of the divorcement of the aesthetic and the functional aspects of literature in the decade's literary criticism.

Farrell was not calling for an appreciation of art divorced from its social content, as he demonstrated in the book's second chapter which discussed impressionism. Art deals with the fullness of human social experience;

impressionism wrongly isolates the subjective aesthetic aspects of art and excludes the functional-objective realm. Farrell felt that this theory "leads to preciousness, and preciousness leads to sapped vitality, and then to surfeit." Any such narrow theory reduced art to mere sensation and separated it from life.

In discussing left-wing criticism, Farrell pointed out that radical critics sometimes make the opposite error and disregard the aesthetic aspects of art. He pointed to the errors in Mike Gold's "revolutionary sentimentalism," the irrational, idealization of the worker-writer. Gold was wrong in believing that proletarian art could grow without benefit of tradition and craft. Equally wrong was Granville Hicks who approached literature mechanically from the outside with a narrow set of absolutes and abstractions. Ultimately, Farrell felt that these extremes in radical criticism fail for " they separate aesthetic and social implications, superimposing one upon the other."

Farrell saw a power and richness in literature that went beyond its necessary reflection of social and economic realities. He insisted that this view of art was consistent with Marxism, for Marx himself had recognized the aesthetic side of art. The complexity of art could not be reduced to simple formula, Farrell argued, without crass simplification and violation of the very spirit of Marxism. To confine literature to equations and simple categories was to substitute narrow ideology for true critical

judgment: "If barbed-wire fences are to be placed around the minds of the proletariat and its allies, what then of the stream of cultural continuity? If the critic would like to dam off this stream of cultural continuity, does he actually believe he can?" Revolutionary criticism must assimilate the best of the past; anything else was an oversimplified use of Marxism.

Throughout Note, it is Farrell's insistence on variety, wholeness, and richness in life and literature that gives authority to his argument: "It is characteristic of life that it constantly tends to overflow the categories which are set up as the basis for apprehending, organizing, understanding, controlling, and changing it." Farrell saw literature as a reservoir for this overflow, a diverse mixture of emotion, philosophy, reality and craft dealing imaginatively with life's multiple experiences. Critics who would deny this diversity and pigeonhole literature had, Farrell said, outlived their usefulness. Literature must be viewed as an instrument of social influence, but not as mere propaganda, for literature could and ought to encompass the many possibilities of the class struggle.

Radical literary criticism must recognize pluralism in literature. It must avoid formula and help create an atmosphere in which a maximum of value and effect is gained from literature. The literary critic must examine a work with imagination, sensory capacity, and reasoning, not with equations and simple categories. Farrell called for an



end to narrow critical aberrations and a renewed emphasis on growth and fullness. Farrell saw that rigidity could only harm the revolutionary cultural movement "which has much to assimilate, much to understand, much to produce. If it is going to assimilate what is alive from the traditions, it has inherited, fight what is dead within them, and carry forward to the future, expanding and enlarging these traditions and creating new ones, it must now stop cooking up recipes for culture."<sup>63</sup>

This insistence on freedom and diversity drew praise from radical independents like Edmund Wilson who found Note to be "a remarkable event" and one of the most intelligent discussions of literature from a Marxist point of view yet written by an American. Wilson concluded his review by saying of Farrell that "the effort to examine and to understand is what he has been able to bring to literature as well as life."<sup>64</sup> The Partisan Review also praised Note by calling it the first lengthy statement of a critical stance that must become the dominant view if revolutionary literature is to grow instead of stagnate. The Partisan Review saw that Farrell was not being destructive in dismissing vulgar leftism; he was simply stressing the importance of literary and human values in dealing with social experience.<sup>65</sup>

Farrell's Note met a different response from the New Masses. Isidor Schneider attacked the work as "incomplete, distorted, lacking in perspective." Hicks

too attacked Farrell for misunderstanding and distortion. Hicks said Farrell's book lacked ideas and value. In rebuttal to Schneider and Hicks, Farrell called for a use of Marxism to extend vision, test experience, and promote literature not to dismiss and degrade all other work.<sup>66</sup>

Looking back at it all from the age of fifty, Farrell said he participated in politics and fought the narrow critical theories of the Stalinists; "but always," Farrell said, "the content of my life has been mainly in my writing. When I was young, I knew that I must become a writer or nothing. Since 1928 I have written almost every day of my life." As a young man Farrell was full of indignation at poverty, oppression, ignorance, and the multiple factors that sadden human lives; this indignation played a vital role in his fiction. But beyond this concern with social reality, Farrell wrote out of necessity. He was pushed by the urge to examine experience and create imaginative truth. This creative process, Farrell felt, was a profound mystery: "Locked up in that mystery is a whole world of feeling. We should approach the question of understanding it with some awe and humility."<sup>67</sup>

To conclude this discussion of important and characteristic writers of the Partisan Review of the 1930s, we will focus on another writer whose work was full of indignation at poverty, oppression, and the many factors that threaten human lives and whose outlet for this indignation was the multifaceted examination of reality

through creative writing. James Agee's work cannot be easily categorized. He wrote poetry, short fiction, a novel, film scripts and film criticism, and a book on southern tenant farming. Crammed into all his writing were deep probing excursions into history, sociology, philosophy, aesthetics, education, and religion. Agee's approach to reality was anything but dogmatic; his poetic-prose surrounded its subject, illuminated it from various perspectives and sought ultimately to heighten the divine mystery at the center of life, not to reduce it to economic formula.

Agee first appeared in the December, 1937 issue of Partisan Review, the issue which announced the journal's unequivocal independence from all factional politics. In this issue he appeared alongside a brilliant array of poets, fiction writers, and critics including Wallace Stevens, James Farrell, Delmore Schwartz, Edmund Wilson, and Lionel Trilling. Agee contributed eleven short lyric poems to this issue. Many of the poems implicitly dealt with the social crisis of the times: one focused on apocalyptic thunder, another on the hopeful growth and bloom that comes from fall and decay. There was a hope for change and resurrection in some of the lyrics, but Agee was writing about the wonder of renewal not about concrete solutions to political problems. One lyric specifically pointed to the dangers of dogma. It pictured figures barricaded behind intellectual hedges, fearful of the mysterious and

irrational. Agee asked the ideologues: "Have you surely added it up to the right amount?/ Shall florid history never split your pot?"

Agee appeared again in the Partisan Review two issues later in a special poetry section which presented works by Wallace Stevens, Kenneth Patchen, Delmore Schwartz, and Agee. Here again his poem had political relevance--it focused on racial intolerance--but its humor softened the political message.<sup>69</sup> Agee's most memorable medium was prose, and in late 1938 he contributed the short story "Knoxville: Summer of 1915" to the Partisan Review. Talking of the summer evenings in Tennessee with the populars, tulip trees, cottonwoods, locust, fire flies, dewy grass, and whispering lawn hoses, Agee vividly recreated the setting of his childhood. Agee presented the nightly neighborhood routine of supper, comfort, and aimless talk. Despite love and kindness, the atmosphere offered little in terms of self-discovery. Beyond the specifics of the pleasant tasks, enchanting sounds, and slow, dream-like movements of the evening, Agee's real subject was the unfathomable mystery, sorrow, and blessedness of this childhood:

By some chance, here they are, all on this earth;  
and who shall ever tell the sorrow of being on  
this earth, lying, on quilts, on the grass, in a  
summer evening, among the sounds of night. May  
God bless my people...Oh, remember them kindly in  
their time of trouble, and in the hour of their  
taking away.<sup>70</sup>

After Agee's sudden tragic death in 1955, editors used "Knoxville: Summer of 1915" as a prologue for Agee's

novel A Death in the Family. This was an appropriate use of the short story, for the novel too detailed the sorrow and mystery of a childhood. Agee's theme here was his constant theme: survival in the face of the onslaughts of experience. Here the Follet family endured the death of the father, Jay. The novel is memorable for its sharply drawn characters--the lonely father, the loving mother, the growing son, the pious aunt, the stern pastor, the inept brother--its poetic language, its deep feeling, and its brilliant depiction of strength and dignity in the face of immense suffering.<sup>71</sup>

The depiction of dignity in the face of suffering was the motive behind Agee's best work, the monumental Let Us Now Praise Famous Men. Many authorities of the thirties point to this work as a supreme achievement of the decade. Richard Pells said that Agee's work was at once the most radical work of the decade and the era's greatest literary achievement for Agee was acutely aware of all the social, moral, political and aesthetic implications of a particular experience. Agee sought not rigid single vision, but total understanding.<sup>72</sup> Harvey Swados called the work an extraordinary evocation of life and an American classic.<sup>73</sup> Alfred Kazin praised the book for its sensitivity and its great moral intensity.<sup>74</sup>

Agee's achievement in Let Us Now Praise Famous Men is a culmination and fulfillment of the best impulses of the decade. It is an angry work, but Agee's rebellion

against oppressive social realities does not lead him to oversimplification. Walker Evans, the photographer who collaborated with Agee on the work, said Agee's writing was induced partly by his intense but private rebellion: "Agee's rebellion was unquenchable, self-damaging, deeply principled, infinitely costly, and ultimately priceless."<sup>75</sup> In another memoir of Agee, Robert Fitzgerald recalled attending a meeting of radical writers with Agee and listening to a talk on the writer's responsibility to the Spanish Civil War. Fitzgerald said that Agee supported the Republican cause in Spain, but never saluted anyone with a raised fist: "He had joined the battle on another ground."<sup>76</sup>

Agee participated in the battle through his art, a rich, complex medium developed precisely to shatter barriers, boundaries, classes and categories. In planning his work on all aspects of the lives of three Southern tenant farmers, Agee was determined to produce as exhaustive a reproduction and analysis of the complexities of the experience as he was capable of doing. He said that "any given body of experience is sufficiently complex and ramified to require... more than one mode of reproduction: it is likely that this one will require many, including some that will extend writing and observing methods."<sup>77</sup> He said he and Evans were attempting to deal with the experience not as "journalists, sociologists, politicians, entertainers, humanitarians, priests, or artists." The governing instrument of their inquiry was to be "the individual, anti-authoritative human consciousness."<sup>78</sup>

This individual human consciousness was also the subject of the inquiry. Agee attempted to reproduce "human actuality," to detail all that he perceived and remembered in the lives of these families, their physical environment and their inner complexities. Above all Agee sought "an independent inquiry into certain normal predicaments of human divinity." Thus the work contains both the documentation of the harsh assaults on these lives by greed, poverty, social abuse, and institutional neglect and also reflections on the mysterious sacred center of all life. The documentation of poverty is a radical indictment of our society; Agee recorded the appalling damage done to these people in the name of work, education, freedom and democracy.

Indeed the book is prefaced by a quote from the Communist Manifesto: "Workers of the world unite and fight. You have nothing to lose but your chains, and a world to win." In a footnote, however, Agee said these words were not included to mislead others to categorize or label the volume incorrectly; the words were not the property of any faith, faction, or political party, Agee said, and they meant only what they literally said. Agee felt but "part-allegiance" to the communist party and felt ill at ease with their rigidity. "I am most certainly for an intelligent communism," Agee said, "for no other form or theory of government seems to me conceivable; but even this is only a part of much more, and a means to an end:

and in every concession to a means, the end is put in danger of all but certain death." Agee was not a joiner; he felt intense allegiance only toward the ideas of individual freedom and dignity, ideas that went far beyond political factions.<sup>79</sup>

Agee's Let Us Now Praise Famous Men possesses power beyond any journalistic or sociological account of the harshness of poverty because of his conviction that this damage was being done to sacred life. Agee reverently recognized the seriousness, complexity and mystery of his subject:

Each is intimately connected with the bottom and the extremist reach of time; each is composed of substances identical with the substance of all that surrounds him, both the common objects of his disregard, and the hot centers of stars. All that each person is, and experiences, and shall never experience, in body and in mind, all these things are differing expressions of himself and of one root, and are identical: and not one of these things nor one of these persons is ever quite to be duplicated, nor replaced, nor has it ever quite had precedent: but each is new and incommunicably tender life, wounded in every breath, and almost as hardly killed as easily wounded: sustaining, for a while, without defense, the enormous assaults of the universe.<sup>80</sup>

This reverent respect for life was the center of Agee's work; it sent his prose soaring in its flight, touching on all facets of experience, avoiding all traces of single-mindedness. Like the other writers attracted to the forum offered by the Partisan Review, Agee was concerned with the effect of social systems on individual lives. He documented the damage done to individual lives by a faltering economic system. Like the others, he saw



that these individual lives were too complex to be simply arranged into a single system. He therefore crafted an artistic medium flexible enough to respond to this complexity.

## CONCLUSION

American literature is distinguished by the number of dangerous and disturbing books in its canon--and American criticism by its ability to conceal this fact.

Leslie Fiedler

This I remember. Some people put it out of their minds....I don't. I don't want to forget....I want it to be there because this is what happened. This is the truth, you know. History.

Cesar Chavez on the 1930s

Our emotions at that time were not cheap; they were deeply felt....The feeling was there.

Malcolm Cowley on the 1930s

When looking back on the 1930s from the vantage point of the 1960s, William Phillips said, "I think it would be shameful if we were to deny that past. I would like to stand by it, stand by its idealism and its stupidities."<sup>1</sup> This study has been my attempt to "stand by" the literature of that era.

It was not difficult to point to stupidities and narrowness on the part of some radical intellectuals in the 1930s. The communist party critics were often guilty of blatant demagoguery in their critical pronouncements. The New Masses was full of examples of short-sightedness, prejudice, and coercion. This abuse was not necessarily the result of radical ideology, for many radicals avoided dogmatic literary views. It seemed to spring from an over-zealous desire for immediate change; in this fervor, literature was viewed as a tool, a weapon.

These readily observed abuses of literature should not, however, cloud over appreciation of that decade's successes. Throughout my study of the decade's literature I found works that were strong in both their human and literary values.

The Partisan Review was a center for this integration of social purpose and art. Its writers depicted the victims of the American system while avoiding dogma and rigidity. Nelson Algren studied the dispossessed, the bottom-dogs, the hoboes and nameless victims on the bum from Chicago's innercity to the vast stretches of Texas. Yet, Algren would not glorify the moral consciousness of these people; he sought the truth and this truth included the moral decay of the victims of poverty. His art presented a painful examination of isolation and defeat.

John Dos Passos presented a radical vision of a divided America with a corrupt ruling elite and a crushed mass of underlings. His detailed examination of three decades of our history found little to be positive about, save a few isolated figures working for the common good. Yet he distrusted radical bureaucracy as well as capitalist greed, and he refused to conceal that distrust. His revolutionaries fare little better than his corporate executives. James T. Farrell's naturalism caught the sidewalks, street corners, pool rooms and speech of a Chicago neighborhood. The destiny of Studs was determined, in part, by the overwhelming cultural poverty that lay beneath the cliches of this typical American neighborhood. Yet Farrell also probed the limitations of personality. In his criticism, Farrell stressed imaginative freedom as well as social message. James Agee detailed the poverty of three families, victims of the share-cropping system. Yet his emphasis was not on economics; Agee was determined to reveal the divinity of his subjects.

A great deal of the decade's literature addressed itself to the era's social problems. The decade produced a new generation of writers acutely aware of the discrepancies in American life: Robert Cantwell had worked in the plywood veneer factory he depicted in Land of Plenty; Edward Dahlberg had grown up in the orphanages described in Bottom Dogs; Henry Roth had lived in the ghetto that provided the setting for Call It Sleep. These writers and many others broadened the range of literature to

include the gangs of young Irish delinquents, the bottom-dogs of the ghetto and factory, the southern share-croppers, rebellious farmers, the Oakies, and boxcar hoboes. The writers stressed the relationship of these new characters to the experiences of their social environment. As readers we see the effects of breadlines, handouts, hunger, hopelessness, and dispossession. The writers broadened our understanding of and sympathy for victims of the depression. The writer of the depression was a citizen working with others on common problems, not an exiled spectator watching the collapse of values. Malcolm Cowley spoke of this renewed engagement in the art of the 1930s:

A new conception of art was replacing the idea that it was something purposeless, useless, wholly individual and forever opposed to a stupid world. The artist and his art had once more become a part of the world, produced by and perhaps affecting it; they had returned toward their earlier and indispensable task of revealing its values and making it more human.<sup>2</sup>

The literature of the 1930s went beyond social involvement, for example in the technical experiments of John Dos Passos, the mythic symbolism of Henry Roth, and the soaring language of James Agee. The writers of the era were not, on the whole, confined by ideology or dogma. They were not obedient to the formula of Socialist Realism. Their novels do not end with the vision of a triumphant communist state; rather, Cass KcKay of Somebody in Boots and Lorry Lewis of Bottomdogs continue their blind wanderings, Studs Lonigan dies a victim of his debaucheries, and Johnny Hagen of Land of Plenty weeps in the rain after

an unsuccessful strike. Some writers became temporarily dogmatic, but for many others it was the era and not a single party that was the dominant influence. They reacted to the era with individuality and integrity.

The Partisan Review of the 1930s encouraged this individuality and integrity. In its critical pronouncements it moved from the "leftism" of the communist critics; it denounced rigidity and formula in revolutionary fiction. It encouraged its circle of writers to look to tradition for strength. It also pointed to the lessons to be learned from the rich variety of modern American and European artists. While the New Masses rejected all but the most explicit radical fiction, the Partisan Review supported a wide range of works. It opened its pages to many authors, including John Dos Passos, James T. Farrell and James Agee, whose achievements have enriched our literary heritage.

Hopefully, my study will serve as a spur to further investigation and appreciation of the decade's achievements. There is much work to be done. The hundreds of volumes of work produced by the Federal Writers Project remain unevaluated. There was a proliferation of picaresque fictions during the 1930s that could provide the basis for exciting study. The writers of the decade took part in various extra-literary activities and the effect of this partisanship on their fiction is yet to be determined. One particular extra-literary activity that the reader of this study will note is the need that writers of the 1930s

expressed to organize into various clubs, leagues, and congresses. Threatened by worldwide social and economic chaos, artists, normally intensely individual, sought collective support. This complex phenomenon warrants investigation.

These various investigations will be rewarding for, despite the hard times, the era's intellectual figures testify to an excitement, purpose and vitality that command attention.<sup>3</sup> As David Peck said, a renewed interest in the literature of the 1930s will help us understand how these writers "raised the conception of the purpose and practice of literature....how they stood and fought, in a decade of panic and crisis, for basic human rights, for the dignity of man."<sup>4</sup>

## FOOTNOTES

### INTRODUCTION.

<sup>1</sup>Saul Alinsky, quoted by Studs Terkel, Hard Times, (New York, 1971), p. 358.

<sup>2</sup>For the call for re-evaluation of the literature of the 1930s see especially David Peck, "The Orgy of Apology: The Recent Reevaluation of the Literature of the Thirties," Science and Society, 32 (1968), pp. 371-387.

### CHAPTER I.

<sup>1</sup>Joseph Freeman, "Old Fervor and New Discipline," New Masses (December 15, 1936), pp. 5-8.

<sup>2</sup>John Dos Passos, "Grandfather and Grandson," New Masses, (Dec., 15, 1936), p. 19.

<sup>3</sup>For accounts that stress the variety of the radical-intellectual climate in the Village prior to WWI, see Daniel Aaron, Writers on the Left, (New York, 1961) pp. 15-68; James Gilbert, Writers and Partisans, (New York, 1968) pp. 4-40; Malcolm Cowley, Exile's Return, (New York, 1951), pp. 49-80.

<sup>4</sup>Cowley, Exile's Return, p. 51, 53, 66.

<sup>5</sup>Joseph Freeman, "Greenwich Village Types," New Masses VIII, (May, 1933), pp. 18-20.

<sup>6</sup>Thomas Callanan, "The Political Dissent of the New York Literary Intellectuals," unpublished Phd dissertation, (Univ. of Illinois, 1970), p. 18.

<sup>7</sup>John Reed quoted by Callanan, "Political Dissent," p. 20.

<sup>8</sup>Floyd Dell, Homecoming: An Autobiography, (New York, 1969), p. ix, 79, 93, 106, 107, 126.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 146, 147.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 261.

<sup>11</sup>For accounts of the earlier radical fiction see Walter Rideout, The Radical Novel in the United States, (Cambridge, Mass., 1956), pp. 1-88; Daniel Aaron, Writers,



pp. 1-30; Granville Hicks, The Great Tradition, (New York, 1935), pp. 32-207; Fay M. Blake, The Strike in the American Novel, (New Jersey, 1972), pp. 1-115.

<sup>12</sup>Gilbert, Writers and Partisans, pp. 9-12.

<sup>13</sup>Rideout, Radical Novel, p. 21.

<sup>14</sup>Howe, quoted by Richard Fitzgerald, "Radical Illustrators of the Masses and Liberator: A Study of the Conflict Between Art and Politics," unpublished Phd dissertation, (Univ. of California, Riverside, 1969), p. 6.

<sup>15</sup>Eastman, quoted by Callanan, "Political Dissent," p. 6. Callanan's discussion of the Masses is excellent, as are the discussions by Fitzgerald, Aaron, Rideout, and Gilbert.

<sup>16</sup>Eastman, quoted by Callanan, p. 13.

<sup>17</sup>Masses' masthead, Aaron, Writers, p. 21.

<sup>18</sup>Eastman, quoted by Callanan, p. 7.

<sup>19</sup>Reed, quoted by Callanan, p. 7.

<sup>20</sup>Eastman, quoted by Callanan, p. 35.

<sup>21</sup>Joseph Freeman, "The Tradition of American Revolutionary Literature," in American Writers Congress, ed. Henry Hart, (New York, 1935), pp. 52-58.

<sup>22</sup>Max Eastman, "Bunk About Bohemia," Modern Monthly VIII, (May, 1934), pp. 200-208 and "New Masses for Old," Modern Monthly VIII (June, 1934), pp. 292-300. It is instructive to note that these articles were written defending the Masses magazine against attack by the New Masses. In its dogmatism, the New Masses tried to portray the Village as an irresponsible gathering of aesthetes.

<sup>23</sup>Eastman, "New Masses for Old," pp. 292-294.

<sup>24</sup>Dell quoted by Fitzgerald, "Radical Illustrators," p. 14, 28.

<sup>25</sup>Eastman, "New Masses for Old," pp. 295-300.

<sup>26</sup>Richard H. Pells, Radical Visions and American Dreams, (New York, 1933), p. 12. For further discussion of the radical climate in the 1920s see Gilbert, Writers and Partisans, pp. 39-89; Rideout, Radical Novel, pp. 110-135; Aaron, Writers, pp. 49-119; and Cowley's Exile's Return.

<sup>27</sup>For a full discussion of the court trials see Callanan, "Political Dissent," pp. 25-35.

<sup>28</sup>See Aaron, Writers, pp. 49-57.

<sup>29</sup>Cowley, Exile's Return, p. 67, 72, 214.

<sup>30</sup>Dell, quoted by Fitzgerald, "Radical Illustrators," p. 12.

<sup>31</sup>Jack Salzman and Barry Wallenstein, eds., Years of Protest, (New York, 1967), p. 11.

## Chapter II.

<sup>1</sup>Hoover, quoted by Dixon Wecter, The Age of the Great Depression, (New York, 1948), p. 1.

<sup>2</sup>Daniel Aaron and Robert Bendiner, eds., The Strenuous Decade, (New York, 1970), p. 5.

<sup>3</sup>Terkel, Hard Times, p. 97.

<sup>4</sup>Robert Goldston, The Great Depression, (New York, 1968), p. 38.

<sup>5</sup>Caroline Bird, The Invisible Scar, (New York, 1966), p. 7.

<sup>6</sup>Wecter, Age, p. 16, 17.

<sup>7</sup>For details of this severe displacement see Bird, Scar, pp. 1-107; Salzman and Wallenstein, Protest, pp. 1-15; Goldston, Depression, pp. 58-157; Terkel, Hard Times.

<sup>8</sup>Salzman and Wallenstein, Protest, p. 12.

<sup>9</sup>Wecter, Age, p. 13.

<sup>10</sup>Goldston, Depression, p. 238.

<sup>11</sup>Alfred Kazin, Starting Out in the Thirties, (Boston, 1962), p. 165.

<sup>12</sup>Bird, Scar, p. xviii.

<sup>13</sup>Nathanael West, Miss Lonelyhearts, (1933; reprint, New York, 1962), p. 4.

<sup>14</sup>West, Day of the Locust, (1933; reprint, New York, 1962), p. 177.

- <sup>15</sup>Terkel, Hard Times, p. 67.
- <sup>16</sup>Robert Bendiner, Just Around the Corner, (New York, 1968), p. 50.
- <sup>17</sup>Will Rogers quoted by Goldston, Depression, p. 51.
- <sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 81.
- <sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 86.
- <sup>20</sup>Terkel, Hard Times, p. 248.
- <sup>21</sup>Goldston, Depression, p. 210.
- <sup>22</sup>Cowley, Exile's Return, p. 308.
- <sup>23</sup>Cowley, Think Back on Us: A Chronicle of the 1930s, (Illinois, 1967), p. 347.
- <sup>24</sup>Wilson quoted by Gilbert, Writers and Partisans, p. 93.
- <sup>25</sup>William Phillips, "What Happened in the 30s," Commentary XXIV, (Sept, 1962), p. 204.
- <sup>26</sup>Edmund Wilson, The Shores of Light, (New York, 1952), p. 526.
- <sup>27</sup>Cowley, Think Back, pp. 87-94.
- <sup>28</sup>See Richard Pells, Radical Visions, p. 83.
- <sup>29</sup>Bird, Scar, p. 141.
- <sup>30</sup>Granville Hicks, "The Fighting Decade," in Strenuous Decade, Aaron and Bendiner, p. 512.
- <sup>31</sup>Malcolm Cowley, "Whither the American Writers?" Modern Quarterly, VI (1932), pp. 11-19.
- <sup>32</sup>Cowley, "The Seven Years of Crisis," in The Writer in a Changing World, ed. Henry Hart, (New York, 1937), pp. 44-47. It was Granville Hicks who responded dogmatically; his case will be discussed in chapter 4.
- <sup>33</sup>Cowley, "A Remembrance of the Red Romance," Esquire, (March, 1964), pp. 124-130.
- <sup>34</sup>Alfred Kazin, Starting Out, p. 3, 5, 11, 138.
- <sup>35</sup>Edmund Wilson, "Foster and Fish," in The American Earthquake, (New York, 1958), p. 180.

- <sup>36</sup>Wilson, Shores of Light, p. 493.
- <sup>37</sup>Wilson, "What I believe," The Nation, 134 (Jan. 27, 1932), pp. 95-98.
- <sup>38</sup>Wilson, Shores of Light, p. 53.
- <sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 640, 643, 645, 647, 742.
- <sup>40</sup>Sherwood Anderson, "Whither the American Writers?" Modern Quarterly VI (1932), pp. 11-19.
- <sup>41</sup>Sherwood Anderson, New Masses VII (Feb., 1932), p. 3.
- <sup>42</sup>Anderson, "How I Came to Communism," New Masses VIII (Sept., 1932), pp. 6-8.
- <sup>43</sup>Anderson, Puzzled America, (New York, 1935), pp. ix, xii, 5, 150, 256.
- <sup>44</sup>Alfred Kazin, On Native Grounds, (1942, reprint New York, 1956), p. 286.
- <sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 378.
- <sup>46</sup>Harvey Swados, The American Writer and the Great Depression, (New York, 1966), p. xvi.
- <sup>47</sup>Pells, Radical Visions, p. 197, 201.
- <sup>48</sup>Harold Clurman, The Fervent Years: The Story of the Group Theatre, (New York, 1945), p. 115.
- <sup>49</sup>Bird, Scar, p. 155.
- <sup>50</sup>Malcolm Goldstein, The Political Stage: American Drama and the Theatre of the Great Depression, (New York, 1974), p. 31. For further discussion of the drama of the 1930s, see Gerald Rabkin, Drama and Commitment: Politics and Commitment in the American Theatre of the Thirties, (Bloomington, Indiana, 1964); Hallie Flanagan, Arena: The History of the Federal Theatre, (New York, 1965); and Sam Smiley, The Drama of Attack: Didactic Plays of the American Depression, (Columbia, Missouri, 1972).
- <sup>51</sup>Pells, Radical Visions, p. 256.
- <sup>52</sup>Clurman, Fervent Years, p. ix.
- <sup>53</sup>Ibid., p. 6, 9, 19, 29, 33, 34, 163, 176.

CHAPTER III.

- <sup>1</sup>Clurman, Fervent Years, p. 65, 66.
- <sup>2</sup>New Masses, (NM) (May, 1926).
- <sup>3</sup>Dos Passos, "The New Masses I'd Like," NM I (June, 1926), p. 20.
- <sup>4</sup>Gold, "Let It Be Really New," NM I (June, 1926), p. 20.
- <sup>5</sup>"Author's Field Day," NM (July 3, 1934), pp. 27-33.
- <sup>6</sup>Y. F. Calverton, "Review of Floyd Dell," NM I (Oct., 1926), p. 28.
- <sup>7</sup>Gold, "Three Schools of American Writing," NM IV p. 13, 14.
- <sup>8</sup>Gold, "Hemingway--White Collar Poet," NM III (March, 1928), p. 21.
- <sup>9</sup>Stanley Burnshaw, "Turmoil on the Middle Ground," NM (Oct. 27, 1936), p. 24.
- <sup>10</sup>Isidor Schneider, "Review of Ideas of Order," NM (Oct. 27, 1936), p. 24.
- <sup>11</sup>The conflict between Stevens and Burnshaw is discussed in Years of Protest, Salzman and Wallenstein, pp. 245-253.
- <sup>12</sup>Burnshaw, "Mr. Tubbe's Morning Service," in New Masses: An Anthology of the Rebel Thirties, ed. Joseph North, (New York, 1969), p. 64.
- <sup>13</sup>Harriet Monroe, "Art and Propaganda," Poetry XLIV (July, 1934), pp. 210-215.
- <sup>14</sup>See NM II (Dec., 1926), p. 3; NM IV (June, 1928), p. 15; NM VI (Oct., 1930), p. 3.
- <sup>15</sup>See NM (Nov. 20, 1934), p. 21 and NM (April 3, 1934), p. 31.
- <sup>16</sup>Stephen Alexander, "Art Column," NM (Dec. 11, 1934), p. 28.
- <sup>17</sup>See NM (April 2, 1938), p. 73; NM (April 4, 1939), p. 23; NM V (April, 1930), p. 5.

<sup>18</sup>See NM IV (June, 1928), p. 16; NM IV (Aug., 1928), p. 2; NM V (June, 1929), p. 10.

<sup>19</sup>NM IX (Sept., 1933), p. 2.

<sup>20</sup>NM VI (July, 1930), p. 23.

<sup>21</sup>NM VII (April, 1932), p. 12 and NM (Oct., 22, 1935), p. 23.

<sup>22</sup>NM VI (Sept. 30, 1929), p. 4.

<sup>23</sup>NM (Sept. 28, 1937), p. 22.

<sup>24</sup>Bendiner, Just Around the Corner, p. 228.

<sup>25</sup>Cowley, "Remembrance of the Red Romance, Part II," Esquire, (April, 1964), p. 29.

<sup>26</sup>NM VIII (April, 1933), p. 29.

<sup>27</sup>Albert Halper, Goodby Union Square, (Chicago, 1970), p. 17, 87.

<sup>28</sup>NM (Jan., 1932), p. 5. For a discussion of this article and the response of NM editors, see Swados, American Writer and Great Depression, pp. 181-190.

<sup>29</sup>Edward Dahlberg, Bottom Dogs, (San Francisco, 1961), pp. 257-269.

<sup>30</sup>Dahlberg and D. H. Lawrence, preface to Bottom Dogs, pp. iii-xvii.

<sup>31</sup>Wilson, Shores of Light, p. 446.

<sup>32</sup>NM VIII (Dec., 1932), p. 26.

<sup>33</sup>Rideout, Radical Novel, p. 174; Pells, Radical Visions, p. 204; Harry Moore, preface to Robert Cantwell's Land of Plenty, (Carbondale, Illinois, 1971), p. iii. The new and brilliant use of strike material by many writers of the 30s is also discussed in Fay M. Blake's The Strike in the American Novel, pp. 117-180. Although the strike had long been a subject in American fiction, Blake points out that in the 1930s this genre blossomed into a complex form capable of dealing with a number of themes. Granville Hicks, on the other hand, called Cantwell a "defeatist" and regreted his failure to see the bright communist future, NM (Sept. 28, 1937), p. 22.

<sup>34</sup>Cowley, "Remembrance of the Red Romance, Part I," p. 127.

<sup>35</sup>Partisan Review I (June-July, 1934), p. 52, 53.

<sup>36</sup>NM II (Nov., 1926), p. 4.

<sup>37</sup>NM VIII (Nov., 1932).

<sup>38</sup>Hicks, quoted by Rideout, Radical Novel, p. 318.

<sup>39</sup>Critical response to this conference and the effects on the NM has been unanimous. All agree that here was a specific instance of direct foreign intervention and control of the NM. See Gilbert, Writers and Partisans, p. 104; Rideout, Radical Novel, p. 145; Aaron, Writers on the Left, p. 221; David Peck, "The Development of an American Marxist Literary Criticism: The Monthly New Masses," unpublished Phd dissertation (Temple Univ., 1968), pp. 180-185. In this study Peck is defending the NM and its contributions to American literary criticism. But even Peck must admit that after Kharkov the NM became more dogmatic: "The connection to the International Union of Revolutionary Writers meant that the magazine became more consciously a political journal. Its editors attempted to develop their political sense to a higher level, and in so doing they began to reflect the militancy and language of the international communist movement."

<sup>40</sup>NM VI (Feb., 1931), p. 6, 7.

<sup>41</sup>Gold, "Notes From Kharkov," NM VI (March, 1931), pp. 4-6.

<sup>42</sup>"Resolution on the Work of the New Masses for 1931 Formulated by the IURW," NM VIII (Sept., 1932), p. 20, 21.

<sup>43</sup>Cowley, "Remembrance of the Red Romance, Part II, p. 78.

<sup>44</sup>NM II (Dec., 1926), p. 3.

<sup>45</sup>Max Eastman, Artists in Uniform: A Study in Literature and Bureaucratism, (New York, 1934).

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>47</sup>See Pells, Radical Visions, pp. 292-329. An interesting account of this about face is provided by a CP member interviewed by Terkel, Hard Times, p. 344.

<sup>48</sup>See NM (Nov. 20, 1934), p. 3; NM (Feb. 19, 1935), p. 3; NM (July 6, 1937), p. 1; NM (March 1, 1938), p. 21.

<sup>49</sup>NM (July 12, 1938), p. 147. Here the magazine says of the term "people's literature": "There is a definite need for some such broad, inclusive term, which would be the literary analogue of the political people's front of democratic front. It would take in as wide a variety of progressive authors as is represented, say, in the League of American Writers."

<sup>50</sup>For a review of the MacLeish case see Aaron, Writers on the Left, p. 265.

<sup>51</sup>MacLeish, quoted by Cowley, Think Back on Us, p. 36.

<sup>52</sup>For example see MacLeish's contribution to NM (Feb. 11, 1936), p. 13.

<sup>53</sup>An important step here is Edwin Burgum's "Hemingway's Development," NM (November 22, 1938), p. 21.

<sup>54</sup>Hemingway, quoted by Joseph North, editor, New Masses: An Anthology, p. 32.

<sup>55</sup>See "Symposium: Thirty Years Later: Memories of the First American Writers' Congress," American Scholar 35 (Summer, 1966), pp. 495-516.

<sup>56</sup>Aaron, Writers on Left, p. 282.

<sup>57</sup>For a full account of these first two Congresses and a full record of the papers delivered see Henry Hart, ed., American Writers' Congress (New York, 1935) and Hart, ed., The Writer in a Changing World, (New York, 1937).

<sup>58</sup>Michael Folsom, ed., Mike Gold: A Literary Anthology, (New York, 1972), p. 7.

<sup>59</sup>Wilson, "The Literary Class War," Shores of Light, p. 534. It is noteworthy that Wilson, with his wide critical vision, was able to see both sides of the controversy. He felt it was wrong of Gold to slight Wilder's style, but he acknowledged the rightness of Gold's demand that fiction be responsible to the problems of the real world.

<sup>60</sup>Mike Gold, "Wilder: Prophet of the Genteel Christ," in Years of Protest, Salzman and Wallenstein, eds., pp. 233-258.

<sup>61</sup>NM (March 10, 1936), p. 20.

<sup>62</sup>Gold, Mike Gold: A Literary Anthology, pp. 62-70.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., pp. 186-189.



<sup>64</sup>Ibid., pp. 203-208.

<sup>65</sup>NM (Dec., 1926), p. 18, 19.

<sup>66</sup>NM (July, 1928), p. 2; NM (Jan., 1930), p. 21.  
Often Gold's narrow pronouncements invite ridicule. One critic poked fun at Gold's vision: "This new artist of Mr. Gold's is going to hop out of his cot in the morning, full of vigor, don his work-stained clothes and dash off to the job to work shoulder to shoulder with other Reds who are doing big vital things, things that count. At night he will return reeking with sweat, heavy with fatigue, but happily drunk with inspiration. He will sit down at his bare table and, writing at top speed, turn out page after page of virile, lyric literature--the real stuff. His work will come straight from the guts and he will scorn the attention to form and polish that those dilettantes over in Paris think so important. Here, says Mr. Gold, is the future artist of America." Robert Sage, quoted by Aaron, Writers on Left, p. 118.

<sup>67</sup>Gold, "Strike: A Mass Recitation," NM (July, 1926), p. 19, 20.

<sup>68</sup>Gold, Jews Without Money (New York, 1930).

<sup>69</sup>Levy, "Review," New Republic, 62 (March 26, 1930), p. 160. Gold, "Reply," New Republic, 63 (June 4, 1930), p. 74.

<sup>70</sup>NM (May 8, 1934), p. 22.

<sup>71</sup>Hicks, "How I Came to Communism," NM VIII (Sept., 1932), p. 6.

<sup>72</sup>Hicks, "The Crisis in American Criticism," NM, VIII (Feb., 1933), pp. 3-5.

<sup>73</sup>Kazin, On Native Grounds, p. 326.

<sup>74</sup>Hicks, The Great Tradition, (New York, 1935), pp. 1-12.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., pp. 40-45, 66, 74-80, 103, 106-123, 126-130, 177, 293-329.

<sup>76</sup>NM (Oct. 3, 1939), p. 21.

<sup>77</sup>Hicks, "The Failure of Left Criticism," New Republic, 103 (Sept. 9, 1940), pp. 345-347. See also Hicks, "Writers in the Thirties," in As We Saw The Thirties, ed. by Rita Simon (Chicago, 1967), pp. 76-101.

<sup>78</sup>"Symposium: Thirty Years Later," American Scholar, 35 (Summer, 1966), pp. 514.

CHAPTER IV.

- <sup>1</sup>Aaron and Bendiner, Strenuous Decade, pp. 301-306.
- <sup>2</sup>See Gilbert, Writers and Partisan, pp. 119-122.
- <sup>3</sup>Hicks, "Our Magazines and their Functions," NM (Dec. 18, 1934), p. 22.
- <sup>4</sup>Gold, "Papa Anvil and Mother Partisan," NM (Feb. 18, 1936), p. 22.
- <sup>5</sup>Hicks, "Those Who Quibble, Bicker, Nag, and Deny," NM (Sept. 28, 1937), p. 22, 23.
- <sup>6</sup>See Gilbert, Writers and Partisans, p. 134 and Partisan Review (PR), II (July-Aug., 1935), p. 2.
- <sup>7</sup>PR, IV (Dec., 1937), p. 3, 4.
- <sup>8</sup>"Ripostes," PR, IV (Dec., 1937), p. 74.
- <sup>9</sup>"Ripostes," PR, IV (Jan., 1938), p. 63.
- <sup>10</sup>"Ripostes," PR, IV (Feb., 1938), p. 61, 62.
- <sup>11</sup>William Phillips, "The Esthetic of the Founding Fathers," PR, IV (March, 1938), pp. 11-21.
- <sup>12</sup>Philip Rahv, "Trials of the Mind," PR, IV (April, 1938), pp. 3-11.
- <sup>13</sup>Leon Trotsky, "Art and Politics," PR, V (Aug.-Sept., 1938), pp. 3-10.
- <sup>14</sup>PR, VI (Fall, 1938), p. 7, 49-53.
- <sup>15</sup>PR, VI (Summer, 1939), pp. 125-127.
- <sup>16</sup>Rahv, "Twilight of the Thirties," PR, VI (Summer, 1939), pp. 3-15.
- <sup>17</sup>PR, VI (Fall, 1939), p. 4.
- <sup>18</sup>Edmund Wilson, "Karl Marx: A Prolet-Play," PR, V (June, 1938), pp. 36-40.
- <sup>19</sup>PR, II (April-May, 1935), p. 3.
- <sup>20</sup>PR, II (April-May, 1935), p. 28.
- <sup>21</sup>Hicks, "The Dialectics of the Development of Marxist Criticism," in American Writers' Congress, ed. Hart, pp. 94-98.

<sup>22</sup>Gilbert, "Partisan Review and the Decline of Literary Radicalism," unpublished Phd dissertation, (Univ. of Wisconsin, 1966), p. 223.

<sup>23</sup>Hart, ed., The Writer in a Changing World, p. 225.

<sup>24</sup>NM (Oct. 19, 1937), p. 21.

<sup>25</sup>Rahv, "Two Years of Progress," PR, IV (Feb., 1938), pp. 22-30.

<sup>26</sup>Rahv and Phillips, "Problems and Perspectives in Revolutionary Literature," PR, I (June-July, 1934), pp. 3-10.

<sup>27</sup>PR, I (Feb.-March, 1934), pp. 58-60.

<sup>28</sup>Rahv, "How the Wast Land Became a Flower Garden," PR, I (June-July, 1934), pp. 3-10.

<sup>29</sup>Phillips, "Three Generations," PR, I (Sept.-Oct., 1934), pp. 49-55.

<sup>30</sup>Carl Van Doren, "To the Left: To the Subsoil," PR, III (Feb., 1936), p. 9.

<sup>31</sup>Andre Gide, "Literature and Society," PR, II (Oct.-Nov., 1935), pp. 36-40.

<sup>32</sup>Rahv, "A Season in Heaven," PR, III (June, 1936), pp. 11-14.

<sup>33</sup>Phillips, "Form and Content," PR, II (Jan.-Feb., 1935), pp. 31-39.

<sup>34</sup>Alan Calmer, "All Quiet on the Revolutionary Front," PR, III (March, 1936), p. 12, 13.

<sup>35</sup>For example, Walter Rideout calls Roth's book "the most distinguished single proletarian novel," Radical Novel, p. 186. William Freedman says of the book: "Such a fusion of myth, symbol, and profound realism...makes Roth's novel one of those rare books of fiction that we can both live and admire, simultaneously." Freedman, "Henry Roth and the Redemptive Imagination," The Thirties, ed. by Warren French (Florida, 1967), pp. 107-114. In looking back on the novel, Granville Hicks said it was "a true proletarian novel, though its Marxist critics did not recognize it as such." Hicks, "Writers in the Thirties," in As We Saw the Thirties, p. 93.

<sup>36</sup>See Freedman, "Henry Roth and the Redemptive Imagination," p. 109.

<sup>37</sup>Henry Roth, Call It Sleep (1934; reprint New York, 1962), p. 441.

<sup>38</sup>PR, II (April-May, 1935), p. 95.

<sup>39</sup>Phillips, "The Humanism of Andre Malraux," PR III (June, 1936), pp. 16-19.

<sup>40</sup>Edmund Wilson, "Flaubert's Politics," PR, IV (Dec., 1937), pp. 13-24.

<sup>41</sup>Wilson, "The Last Phase of Henry James," PR IV (Feb., 1938), pp. 3-8.

<sup>42</sup>Cantwell, PR, III (Feb., 1936), p. 31.

<sup>43</sup>Gilbert, Writers and Partisans, p. 189.

<sup>44</sup>Pells, Radical Visions, pp. 335-340.

<sup>45</sup>Leslie Fiedler, "Partisan Review: Phoenix or Dodo?" Perspectives U.S.A., 15 (Spring, 1956), pp. 82-97.

<sup>46</sup>Norman Podhoretz, Making It (New York, 1967), p. 96, 160.

<sup>47</sup>Howe, quoted by Podhoretz, Making It, p. 100.

<sup>48</sup>Phillips, "Symposium, Thirty Years Later," American Scholar 35 (Summer, 1966), pp. 495-516.

<sup>49</sup>Phillips, "What Happened in the Thirties," Commentary, 34 (Sept., 1962), pp. 204-213.

<sup>50</sup>Rahv and Phillips, "In Retrospect," preface to the first Partisan Review Reader, quoted by Aaron, Writers on the Left, p. 297.

<sup>51</sup>Phillips and Rahv, "A Foreword by the Editors," The New Partisan Reader, (New York, 1953), pp. v-viii.

## CHAPTER V.

<sup>1</sup>Tillie Olsen, "The Iron Throat," PR, I (April-May, 1934), pp. 3-9.

<sup>2</sup>Olsen, Yonnondio, (New York, 1974), p. 157.

<sup>3</sup>See critical comments that introduce and conclude the above edition.

<sup>4</sup>Olsen, Yonnonidio, p. 14, 27, 12, 119.

<sup>5</sup>Olsen, "The Strike," PR, I (Sept.-Oct., 1934), pp. 3-10. See Years of Protest, eds. Salzman and Wallenstein, p. 138 for an anthologized version of Olsen's journalism.

<sup>6</sup>Olsen, Tell Me A Riddle, (New York, 1961), The title story won an O. Henry award as best short story of the year. The stories have a cult following, appearing in various anthologies, literature texts, and lists of favorites.

<sup>7</sup>See Years of Protest, eds. Salzman and Wallenstein, p. 15.

<sup>8</sup>Recounted in Rideout, Radical Novel, p. 147.

<sup>9</sup>Alfred Hayes, "In a Coffee Pot," PR, I (Feb.-March, 1934), pp. 12-15.

<sup>10</sup>Hayes, "Johnny," PR I (Sept.-Oct., 1934) pp. 30-35.

<sup>11</sup>Hayes, "The Port of New York," PR, II (Jan.-Feb, 1935), pp. 10-13.

<sup>12</sup>Hayes, "I Inherited No Country House," PR, II (July-Aug., 1935), p. 28.

<sup>13</sup>Meridel LeSuer, "No Wine in his Cart," PR, I (Nov.-Dec., 1934), pp. 3-8.

<sup>14</sup>Albert Halper, "They Do the Same in England," PR, II (July-Aug., 1935), pp. 29-36.

<sup>15</sup>Josephine Herbst, "What is Americanism," PR, III (April, 1936), p. 6.

<sup>16</sup>Herbst, "Golden Harvest," PR, III (March, 1936), pp. 3-7.

<sup>17</sup>Herbst, "The Enemy," PR, III (Oct., 1936), pp. 7-12.

<sup>18</sup>Richard Wright, "Between the World and Me," PR, II (July-Aug., 1935), p. 18.

<sup>19</sup>Delmore Schwartz, "Poem," PR, IV (Feb., 1938), p. 21.

<sup>20</sup>See Louis Simpson, "The Ghost of Delmore Schwartz," NYT Book Review, Dec. 7, 1975, p. 38.

<sup>21</sup>Schwartz, "In Dreams Begin Responsibilities," PR, IV (Dec., 1937), pp. 5-11.

<sup>22</sup>Simpson, "The Ghost of Schwartz," p. 38.

<sup>23</sup>Nelson Algren, The Neon Wilderness, (New York, 1960), pp. 9-14.

<sup>24</sup>Algren, Somebody in Boots (New York, 1935). For Algren's account of how this book was written see Swados, The American Writer and the Great Depression, p. 319.

<sup>25</sup>Rahv, "Review," PR, II (July-Aug., 1935), p. 63.

<sup>26</sup>Algren, "Storm in Texas," PR, I (Sept.-Oct., 1934), pp. 26-29.

<sup>27</sup>Algren, "No Place to Lie Down," PR, II (Jan.-Feb., 1935), pp. 3-9.

<sup>28</sup>Algren, "American Obituary," PR, II (Oct.-Nov., 1935), p. 26.

<sup>29</sup>Algren, Conversations With Nelson Algren, by H. F. Donohue, (New York, 1964), p. 55, 86, 87, 181.

<sup>30</sup>Dos Passos, U.S.A. (1937; reprint, Sentry Edition, Houghton Millin, Boston, 1960), The 42nd Parallel, p. 13.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., The Big Money, p. 413.

<sup>32</sup>Malcolm Cowley, "Review," New Republic, LXXXVIII (Sept. 9, 1936), p. 343.

<sup>33</sup>Wilson, Shores of Light, p. 433.

<sup>34</sup>Lionel Trilling, "The America of John Dos Passos," PR, IV (April, 1938), p. 26.

<sup>35</sup>Dos Passos, PR, VI (Summer, 1939), p. 27.

<sup>36</sup>Kazin, On Native Grounds, p. 268.

<sup>37</sup>Dos Passos, "Whither the American Writer," Modern Quarterly, VI (1932), pp. 11-19.

<sup>38</sup>Dos Passos, "The Writer as Technician," in American Writers Congress, ed. Hart, pp. 78-82.

<sup>39</sup>Dos Passos, "Grade Crossing," PR, III (Feb., 1936), pp. 3-5.

<sup>40</sup>Dos Passos, "Gus," PR, III (May, 1936), pp. 3-8.

<sup>41</sup>Dos Passos, "Migratory Worker," PR, IV (Jan., 1938), pp. 16-20.

<sup>42</sup>Dos Passos, "Red, White, and Blue Thanksgiving," PR, VI (Winter, 1939), pp. 13-18.

<sup>43</sup>NM (July 4, 1939), p. 21.

<sup>44</sup>Dos Passos, "The Pit and the Pendulum," NM I (Aug., 1926), p. 10.

<sup>45</sup>Gold, "A Barbaric Poem of New York," NM I (Aug., 1926), p. 25.

<sup>46</sup>Dos Passos, NM (Aug., 1930), p. 8.

<sup>47</sup>The letter signed by Dos Passos and the NM reply appear in the March 6, 1934 issue of NM, p. 26.

<sup>48</sup>See for example NM (Aug. 11, 1936), p. 40, 41; NM (April 26, 1938), p. 22, 23.

<sup>49</sup>Hicks, "Writers in the Thirties," in As We Saw The Thirties, p. 88.

<sup>50</sup>Kazin, Starting Out, p. 52 and Native Grounds, p. 296.

<sup>51</sup>James Farrell, "How Studs Lonigan was written," in The Theory of the American Novel, ed. George Perkins, (New York, 1970), pp. 403-410.

<sup>52</sup>Phillips, PR, II (July-Aug., 1935), p. 57.

<sup>53</sup>PR V (Fall, 1938), p. 118.

<sup>54</sup>Farrell, "Young Manhood," PR, I (Feb.-March, 1934), pp. 16-23.

<sup>55</sup>Farrell, "Benefits of American Life," PR, II (Jan.-Feb., 1935), pp. 20-28.

<sup>56</sup>Farrell, "Guillotine Party," PR, II (Oct.-Nov., 1935), pp. 44-51.

<sup>57</sup>Farrell, "Morning With the Family," PR, III (Oct., 1936), pp. 17-20.

<sup>58</sup>Farrell, "Mrs O'Flaherty and Liz," PR, IV (Dec., 1937), pp. 25-31.

<sup>59</sup>Farrell, "The Only Son," PR, VI (Spring, 1939), pp. 65-75.

<sup>60</sup>See Farrell, "The Short Story," in The American Writers' Congress, ed. Hart, pp. 103-114; and Farrell, "The Situation in American Writing," PR VI (Summer, 1939), p. 30, 31.

<sup>61</sup>Farrell, Reflections at Fifty and Other Essays, (New York, 1954), p. 15, 18, 21, 34.

<sup>62</sup>Farrell, "Theatre Chronicle," PR III (April, 1936), p. 24.

<sup>63</sup>Farrell, A Note On Literary Criticism, (New York, 1936), p. 11, 12, 15, 29, 30, 31, 39, 56, 91, 111, 177, 220.

<sup>64</sup>Wilson, quoted by Salzman and Wallenstein, Years of Protest, p. 276. Here also is a complete review of the controversy on the left caused by the publication of A Note.

<sup>65</sup>Alan Calmer, "Down With Leftism," PR, III (June, 1936), pp. 7-9.

<sup>66</sup>Isidor Schneider, "Sectarianism on the Right," NM (June 23, 1936), pp. 23-25; Granville Hicks, "In Defense of James Farrell," NM (July 14, 1936), p. 23; James Farrell, "Farrell Rebuts," NM (Aug. 18, 1936), p. 22.

<sup>67</sup>Farrell, Reflections at Fifty, p. 60, 187.

<sup>68</sup>James Agee, "Lyrics," PR, IV (Dec., 1937), pp. 40-43.

<sup>69</sup>Agee, "Dixie Doodle," PR, IV (Feb., 1938), p. 8.

<sup>70</sup>Agee, "Knoxville: Summer of 1915," PR V (Aug.-Sept., 1938), pp. 22-25.

<sup>71</sup>Agee, A Death in the Family, (New York, 1957).

<sup>72</sup>Pells, Radical Dreams, p. 251.

<sup>73</sup>Swados, American Writer and Great Depression, p. 145.

<sup>74</sup>Kazin, On Native Grounds, p. 387.

<sup>75</sup>Walker Evans, "Forward," Let Us Know Praise Famous Men, (1941; reprint, New York, 1970), p. xi.

<sup>76</sup>Robert Fitzgerald, "A Memoir," in The Collected Short Prose of James Agee, ed. Fitzgerald, (New York, 1970), p. 43.

<sup>77</sup>Agee, "Plans for Work," The Collected Prose, p. 150.

<sup>78</sup>Agee, Let Us Praise, p. xiv, xv.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid., p. svi, 323.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid., p. 53, 54.



# CONCLUSION.

<sup>1</sup>Phillips, "Symposium, Thirty Years Later," p. 500.

<sup>2</sup>Cowley, Exile's Return, p. 283.

<sup>3</sup>There is much testimony which points to the exciting atmosphere of the era. Alfred Kazin remembered that in the 30s there was a spirit of involvement, literary crusading, and a general sense of movement. Kazin praised the literature of the decade, for it convinced him that it was possible to deal with the social experiences of the era in a literary way. In this sense Kazin said that the literature of the era offered personal liberation for the writers. Kazin, Starting Out, p. 11, 13, 15. Warren French commented that like many other times of travail, the 30s produced "a triumphant literature." French, The Thirties, p. 1. Maxwell Geismar wrote that he thought of the 30s as "a brilliant, lively exciting...period." He said that its literature was both "informative and elegant." Geismar, New Masses: An Anthology, pp. 8-10. See also Geismar's Writers in Crisis for a defense of the decade's literature. Malcolm Cowley acknowledged the pain of the decade, but spoke of this time as one "when, living under pressure, one had the sense of being fully alive." Cowley, "Remembrance of the Red Romance, P II," p. 81.

<sup>4</sup>David Peck, "Orgy of Apology," p. 382.

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