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When Southern Labor Stirred: The Literary Reaction to Gastonia

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WHEN SOUTHERN LABOR STIRRED: THE LITERARY
REACTION TO GASTONIA

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Program of American Studies
The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

by

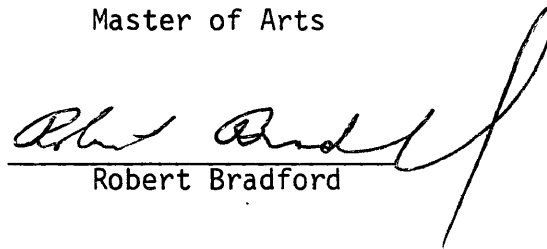
Robert Bradford

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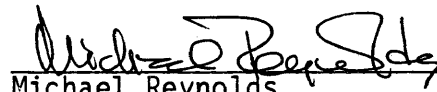
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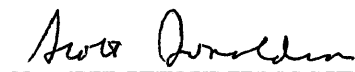
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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the 1929 textile strike at Gastonia, North Carolina, and the literary reaction that the strike inspired. The strike detailed the questions which all of America would have to face in the Depression--What is the role of the American worker in society? What are the fundamental faults of the American economic, political, and social system? What is the role of the writer in the midst of the turmoil of the Depression?

Between 1930 and 1934, six novelists attacked the questions which the strike posed. The six novels, Strike! by Mary Heaton Vorse, Beyond Desire by Sherwood Anderson, Gathering Storm: A Story of the Black Belt by Dorothy Myra Page, To Make My Bread by Grace Lumpkin, Call Home the Heart by Fielding Burke, and The Shadow Before by William Rollins Jr., attested to the impact and significance of the strike at the Loray Mill.

The literary reaction to Gastonia highlighted the broad issues raised by the strike as well as indicated the literary and political problems which the writers of the thirties had to confront. However, the fictional response to Gastonia has not been approached in a comprehensive manner. The Gastonia novels have been defined simply as "Proletarian literature," or as poor artistic endeavors, labels which are vague and inappropriate in defining the diversity of stances found in the works on Gastonia.

The paper argues that the strike and the novels written about the strike hinted at the issues which would become increasingly significant as the Depression evolved.

WHEN SOUTHERN LABOR STIRRED: THE
LITERARY REACTION TO GASTONIA

On April 1, 1929, a drama unfolded in Gastonia, North Carolina, which featured many of the characters of the early Depression. Angry workers battled with heartless bosses; ardent Communists attacked ruthless capitalists; hungry children looked to helpless mothers for hope. The strike at the Loray Mill in Gastonia captured the attention of a confused America on the brink of the Depression. And the drama captured the attention of a group of socially conscious novelists who were fascinated by the issues raised at Gastonia. Between 1930 and 1934, six novels would appear which were directly inspired by the strike-- Strike! by Mary Heaton Vorse, Beyond Desire by Sherwood Anderson, Gathering Storm: A Story of the Black Belt by Dorothy Myra Page, To Make My Bread by Grace Lumpkin, Call Home the Heart by Fielding Burke, and The Shadow Before by William Rollins Jr. No strike in the history of American labor has evoked such a literary response. Gastonia signaled the beginnings of a tumultuous and uncertain decade ahead; it hinted at the cultural and literary confusion of the Depression. Determined to define Gastonia's meaning, the six novelists saw the strike as a warning sign, as a clear indication that things were not well in Hoover's land of business and democracy. By examining the collective literary reaction to Gastonia, we can understand the mixed responses of a concerned and puzzled group of writers who were part of a concerned and puzzled America in the initial years of the Depression.

Before we examine the Gastonia novels, it will be important to gain a basic understanding of the atmosphere of labor in the twenties and the place of the Gastonia strike in the context of the union unrest of the decade. The 1920s were not a prosperous period for labor in America. From 1920 to 1929, nationwide union membership declined by almost half.¹

During the same period, union membership in the textile industry dropped by two-thirds.² With the fall in union membership came a decline in the number of strikes. In the middle to late twenties, the strike as an instrument of collective bargaining had become useless: a last resort, a defense mechanism when all else failed. By 1929, when workers finally did decide to walk to protest wage and working conditions, almost half of their efforts failed.³

The reasons for the drastic decline of labor in the twenties are linked to the intense conservatism of the decade. Capturing the sentiments of the American business culture, Calvin Coolidge declared that "the business of America is business." Herbert Hoover, the embodiment of the *Alger* myth, demanded Americans to pull themselves up by their bootstraps in a land of endless opportunity. Coolidge and later Hoover's belief in the sanctity and glory of the businessman and the corporation was echoed in the pages of Time, the new news magazine of Henry Luce. The magazine featured the personalities America had come to admire and envy--Henry Ford, William Randolph Hearst, John Pierpont Morgan, Charles M. Schwab, and lesser magnates. In the twenties, the individual worker had become secondary to the corporation and the entrepreneur. This fact was not only articulated in the general political and social atmosphere of the period, but also in the legal system. With the Hitchman Doctrine in 1917, the Supreme Court gave its blessing to the yellow-dog contract, a written agreement by the worker that he would not become a union member or organize his fellow employees.⁴ In 1926, in *Dorohy v. Kansas*, the Supreme Court sent a clear message to labor. It was constitutional to punish anyone who conducted an "unjustifiable" strike since "a strike may be illegal

because of its purpose. . . . Neither the common law nor the Fourteenth Amendment confers the absolute right to strike."⁵

If the worker in America did not have enough to contend with in the political and social glorification of big-business in the twenties, he also had to confront nationwide racism and the conservatism of organized labor during the period. The twenties marked the rise of "100 per-cent Americanism." It was a decade that witnessed the growth of racist groups like the Ku Klux Klan to frighteningly high numbers and significant political influence. The Klan and similar hate groups of the decades were not simply anti-black. As A. I. Harris of The New Republic reported, the Klan "raved against the Catholic" and "cursed the Jews" with equal fervor.⁶ Given the widespread fear of immigrants and "foreign agitators," it was virtually impossible for labor to achieve any sort of solidarity. The anti-radical hysteria spawned by World War I and 1919 carried over into the twenties. Ironically, organized labor contributed to the stream of anti-Eastern European and immigrant propaganda. During the 1926 convention of the American Federation of Labor (AFL), labor leaders condemned the Soviet regime as "the most unscrupulous, most anti-social, most menacing institution in the world today."⁷ During the strikes at Passaic and New Bedford, these same labor leaders could only offer their pity to the destitute workers. Ironically, avowed Communists came out defiantly as the leaders and financial supporters of the walk-outs in the two New England cities. For many workers, radical groups remained as the only alternative to an ineffective and conservative mainstream union leadership.

The labor unrest in Passaic and New Bedford eventually made its way to the Piedmont. On April 1, 1929, led by National Textile

Worker's Union (NTWU) organizer Fred Beal, the same man who had orchestrated the 1928 strike at New Bedford, virtually the entire work force at the Loray Mill in Gastonia, North Carolina, walked off the job. Sent to Gastonia by the Communist Party to organize the South, Beal was willing, unlike AFL leaders, to challenge the hold that the mill had on southern workers. Beal's job consisted both of forming a union at the Loray Mill and of stirring up the workers and community. He was successful on both counts. From the outset of the strike, the Gastonia and Charlotte papers ran stories that stressed the ominous nature of the Communist invasion. The Communist threat was clear--"It [the Party] has no religion, it has no color line, it believes in free love--it advocates the destruction of all those things which the people of the South and of the United States hold sacred."⁸ According to the local press and the mill owners, Gastonia was under siege.

However, to understand the strike at Gastonia, we must look past the emotional reactions to the walk-out. Both the well-to-do citizens of Gastonia and the Communist Party interpreted the strike as the beginnings of class revolt in America. The workers, however, did not see things in such dramatic terms. They were not simply pawns manipulated by Communists. Instead, they were reacting to conditions and underlying tensions which had been fermenting for some time. Gastonia was "fertile ground" for a strike, The New York Times observed.⁹ Paul Blanshard of The Nation, who had been examining the conditions of southern laborers for well over a year before the strike at the Loray Mill, realized that the workers cared nothing for Communism. They were simply "fighting for a better life."¹⁰ The textile industry was in dire financial shape by the end of the twenties. The economic collapse

that would become nationwide in the thirties was already overwhelming southern textile workers by 1929. In an act of desperation, the Gastonia millworkers were lashing out at an economically troubled industry. They were protesting sixty-hour weeks and average wages of twenty-five cents an hour; they were protesting the stretch-out system which made workers responsible for more loomwork while not paying them appropriately for their significantly increased output and a way of life that condemned them to poor housing, poor education, and generally unsanitary and unhealthy working and housing conditions. Their demands were moderate. They wanted an elimination of the stretch-out system, a forty-hour week, a minimum weekly wage, sanitary housing, equal pay for women and youths, and a recognition of their union.¹¹

The Communist Party did not view the strike as pragmatically as did the workers. Although Fred Beal was more concerned with winning the strike than creating a grand cause, Communist leaders had entirely different intentions. From Party headquarters in New York, prominent theorists Albert Weisbord and George Pershing arrived in Gastonia at the outset of the strike and began making pronouncements. According to Weisbord, the strike would be "as important in transforming the social and political life of this country as the Civil War itself."¹² The Party saw the strike as having an impact which would reach literally around the world. And through their press, they spread the word about Gastonia to Party members as far away as Hong Kong. For enthusiastic Party leaders, Gastonia symbolized the beginnings of a gathering storm that would rage across the globe.

The owners and managers of the Loray Mill were understandably distressed by the demands of the workers and the claims of the Communists.

But their official response to the strike was characteristic of the business-like manner with which industrialists treated strikes in the twenties--"Our attitude will be that we will not pay any attention to the strike, whatsoever. We will continue to operate. . . ."13 Underneath their restrained public stance, however, the officials of Manville-Jenckes Company were determined to quell the strike as quickly and efficiently as possible. The mill placed several advertisements in the Gastonia Gazette imploring the citizenry to expel the Communists and stop the strike in order to save the "very Foundations of Modern Civilization."14 Leading members of the mill hierarchy helped to form the Committee of 100, a terrorist group which threatened workers, burned relief supplies, and destroyed the union headquarters. For mill officials, the strike was a direct threat to profits and their hold on the Gastonia community. It simply could not be tolerated.

The strike evolved rapidly and violently. Three days after the strike began, North Carolina Governor O. Max Gardner called in the National Guard to maintain the peace. For the first two weeks of the strike, picket lines remained solid despite periodic beatings and arrests by local police officials. By April 15, however, the strikers were unable to keep strikebreakers out of the mill. Operations inside the mill were back to normal and the strike was essentially defeated.15 By May 1, the number of those walking the line had dwindled from 2,000 to 200.16 The remaining strikers, evicted from company houses, were forced to set up a tent colony. On June 7, the tensions which had been building for over two months finally erupted. After a complaint by a neighboring citizen, local police officers drove out to the tent colony to challenge and question the strikers. Shooting broke out and when the smoke

cleared, five were left wounded, including the chief of police who later died. Beal and fifteen other participants in the strike were arrested and charged with conspiracy to commit murder. A sensational trial followed which eventually led to the conviction of Beal and six others. During the trial, Ella May Wiggins, a millworker whose ballads had come to symbolize the defiance and hope of the strikers, was shot and killed by an angry mob. Wiggins' assailants were brought to trial but never convicted. Released on bail, the Gastonia defendants fled to Russia where they hoped to realize their proletarian dreams. Fred Beal eventually returned to the United States, disillusioned with the Party and Soviet life. He served time in a North Carolina prison in 1939 and was released in 1942, only to die twelve years later an embittered and frustrated man.¹⁷ The drama at Gastonia had ended, and the literary response began.

II

The Gastonia strike produced a wave of mixed reactions from interested observers across the nation. Newspapers and magazines sent reporters to the tiny North Carolina town to write of the "Communist invasion." Intellectuals flocked to Gastonia to understand what had transformed complacent southern workers into angry and violent dissenters. The string of labor disputes in the Piedmont during 1929 clearly represented a break from the conservatism of the twenties. The workers at the Loray Mill had declared in no uncertain terms that their business was not "business." On the contrary, they declared that their business consisted of fighting for a decent wage and equitable working conditions. An unfaltering devotion to the corporation was no longer

appropriate in a time of severe economic depression. It was this attitude, this challenge to the philosophy preached by Hoover and Ford and Morgan, which focused the attention of people throughout America to the cries of protest voiced on the streets of Gastonia.

A growing awareness of worker unrest which the Gastonia strike foreshadowed came to many writers by the end of the twenties. As early as 1921, Mike Gold in "Towards Proletarian Art" had urged writers to return to their working class roots, to write of the working masses and their problems.¹⁸ However, it was not until the beginnings of the Depression that Gold's advice would be heeded on a broad scale. By the late twenties, writers and critics ranging from Theodore Dreiser to Edmund Wilson had concluded that the business concerns of the twenties were no longer appropriate in a time when workers across the nation were starving and battling for fundamental human rights. Sherwood Anderson, who was a prominent writer of the twenties, embodied the changing concerns of many writers in the thirties. Where the major writers of the twenties such as T. S. Eliot, Sherwood Anderson, Ernest Hemingway, and F. Scott Fitzgerald were motivated by the desire to make certain moral statements about the decay of values in the decade, the writers of the thirties were motivated by the need to attack the political and social turmoil of the Depression. Writing to Roger and Ruth Sergel in 1930, Anderson declared that he had severed connections with the literary snobbishness of Vanity Fair. He had "just a hunch, a feeling, that the story of labor and the growing industrial[ism] is the great, big story of America."¹⁹

Anderson was right. The move toward proletarian literature became the central rallying point for the increasing social consciousness of

Depression era critics and authors. Mike Gold and The New Masses urged young and old writers to "Go left," to capture the "revolutionary" spirit of the common worker. As Malcolm Cowley has observed, the cultural and economic turmoil of the thirties inspired many writers with a dream of equality and justice. However, examinations of Depression literature have tended to group all of the writing of the thirties as "proletarian," a label which tells us very little about the diversity of attitudes and stances found in the fiction of the thirties. On its most basic level, proletarian literature refers to fiction written about the common laborers. Yet implicit in the term is the idea that proletarian writers were all loyal to the ideology of The New Masses--a belief in literary Communism, class revolt, and the dictates of Marxist theorists. Cowley, who was a witness to the changes and development of writers during the Depression, realized that the individual dreams of writers were as different as the writers themselves. He wrote that the conversion to the political-literary outlook of the thirties "was not rapid or easy. There were discussions, doubts, quarrels, lonely meditations, and sleepless nights."²⁰ The task of creating a new literature about workers in America was often as tumultuous as the Depression itself.

Nowhere are the problems and differences of the "proletarian literature" of the thirties more evident than in the novels about Gastonia. The literary reaction to Gastonia is problematic and diffuse largely because it represents the beginnings of the move toward a literature dealing with depression era workers. Just as Gastonia signaled the growing unrest and changes in America, so did the novels written about the strike embody the transitional and uncertain

beginnings of thirties writing. In his 1935 preface to Proletarian Literature in the United States, leading Marxist critic Joseph Freeman defined the Gastonia novels as the first of a "yield" of an undetermined "proletarian movement."²¹ He could only label the novels as "a proletarian literature of sorts."²² Freeman's comments point to the generally unfocused and diverse nature of the works about Gastonia, for the fiction the strike inspired was by no means a concerted effort to create a literature of the American proletariat. Rather, the Gastonia novels embody a variety of responses to the cultural and literary turmoil of the early Depression.

The novels can be divided into three groups. The works of Mary Heaton Vorse and Sherwood Anderson reveal a non-dogmatic, humanistic concern for the American workers. Both Vorse and Anderson were more concerned with the fate of the worker in America than in Communist Party theory. The novels of Dorothy Myra Page and William Rollins Jr., on the other hand, adhere to the literary Communism preached by The New Masses; they are cries for a revolutionary, classless society. Fielding Burke and Grace Lumpkin were novelists caught between a deeply felt concern for the southern worker and their uncertain desires to profess a revolutionary message. Burke and Lumpkin were attempting to shed their old values as they tried to incorporate Marxist theory into their novels. To understand the attitudes found in the Gastonia novels, it will be useful to examine how the authors interpret the beginnings and causes of the strike. Their views of the beginnings of the strike reveal both their political attitudes and their understanding of the meaning of Gastonia, of how the strike affected the people who had become either directly or indirectly involved with the excitement in

the Piedmont. Using this approach, we can define the Gastonia novelists' responses to the problems raised by the strike and, in a larger sense, the problems facing a changing and perplexed America.

III

"The boss man wants our labor, and money to pack away.
The workers wants a union and the eight hour day."²³
(Ella May Wiggins, *Gastonia Ballader*, 1929)

At first glance, the lives of Mary Heaton Vorse and Sherwood Anderson seem worlds apart. Vorse was born the well-to-do daughter of a New England family that could trace its roots back to the time of the Mayflower.²⁴ Anderson was the son of an adventurous midwestern harness maker and a hired girl from small town Ohio.²⁵ Although their backgrounds were vastly different, their concern for the American laborer brought their respective careers to many of the same battlegrounds. They witnessed the revolt in the Piedmont and the battle for coal in Kentucky, for example. Anderson and Vorse shared throughout their lives a deeply felt sympathy for the plight of workers. From Marching Men to Puzzled America, Anderson displayed his fascination with understanding the modern worker and the effects of industrialism on his psyche. Vorse chose time and time again to fight for the underdog, to force her readers to feel "the suffering of the workers and the dreadful way in which they lived."²⁶ Their interest in and concern for the fate of the laborer ultimately played a major role in shaping their literary careers. And in their novels about Gastonia, Vorse and Anderson's belief in the fundamental importance of the American worker stands out as a common underlying theme.

Among the Gastonia novelists, Mary Heaton Vorse was most intimately familiar with the developments and events of the strike at the Loray

Mill. She covered the strike from its inception and was not afraid to mingle with the angry workers or the Communist organizers. Vorse's method of covering a strike consisted of becoming directly involved with the participants of the walk-out, regardless of the possibilities of violence. Her initial description of the Loray strike essentially voiced the list of demands presented by Beal and the millworkers to management. She wrote of the general breakout of labor unrest in the Piedmont which reached its peak at Gastonia:

No sooner was one strike quelled or settled than another strike broke out somewhere else. They were almost leaderless. They had no unions, but they had had too much work and had been getting too little pay for too long. It was what one so rarely sees, a "spontaneous uprising of the people."²⁷

Vorse described the strike in the terms of labor. Millowners and the stretch-out system demanded too much of the workers while paying them far too little. The logical result of such a situation, even in the "complacent South," would be a refusal on the part of the laborers to continue working. Vorse had seen the same scenario in her career as a labor reporter countless times. But she realized that there was something different, something in the idea of a "spontaneous uprising" which distinguished the strike at Gastonia. Vorse insisted that the walk-out was inspired and engineered by the workers, and not another "sell-out" to the conservative AFL or a Communist-dominated call for revolution. In her view, the workers were openly and rightly defying the demands of an inequitable system.

In her interpretation of the underlying causes of the strike, Vorse challenged the traditional views about the reasons for the walk-out. The local newspapers had attributed the strike solely to the revolutionary actions of outside agitators. Mill management had assured

the public and the workers that if the foreign agitators would leave, the volatile situation would return to business as usual. The idea of southern workers being manipulated by ruthless Communists was prevalent both in the Gastonia community and among outside observers who were only familiar with the mill's interpretation of the strike. A voice of the millowners, The Gastonia Gazette, headlined the threat of the strike--"RED RUSSIANISM LIFTS ITS GORY HANDS RIGHT HERE IN GASTONIA."²⁸

Vorse captured the naivete of this rationale in her portrayal of the Parkers, an upper class family who cannot understand why there should be any problems in Gastonia. Jean Parker explains her understanding of the strike:

'You have no idea how ignorant these mill hands are. My classmate, Marion Scott, teaches in one of the mill schools. You can't get anything through those ignorant women's heads, and so, of course, when a clever agitator, who is unscrupulous, like this Deane gets hold of them, why, he can do anything with such people.'²⁹

Vorse had no tolerance for the simplistic, patronizing attitudes of Jean Parker, of people who viewed workers as an ignorant, hopeless lot fortunate to be employed. Vorse saw the millhands not as complacent and gullible, but as frustrated, angry employees who were subjected to extremely long hours, poor working conditions, and low wages. Vorse understood well the frustrations of the workers. She had eaten and at times slept with them, had become part of their lives. Her personal contact allowed her to see their humanity, to understand that they were at once futile and desperate, brave and indefatigable. Vorse knew the Gastonia workers too well to discount them as willing to accept the dictates of any organizer who came to them with promises. She saw them as angry and at times militant, and above all, as constantly looking for a better life. Looking back at the Gastonia

workers, she remembered "the moment you got their confidence, there are no finer people than those mountain people."³⁰

Throughout her life, Vorse displayed a strong sympathy and belief in the inherent ability of the worker to rise above his circumstances. She had seen in the Lawrence and New Bedford and Passaic strikes "people coming together to build and create instead of to hate and destroy."³¹ It is this idea of workers coming together for unionism which remains as Vorse's fundamental interpretation of the strike at Gastonia. Through Fer Deane, the Communist organizer who represents Fred Beal, Vorse explained the chain of events which led to the walk-out:

'These fellows had a little organization all by themselves. Two fellers, Wes Elliot and Dan Marks, came over to where I was in Rockhill, so I came over here. We met around in houses. Then pretty soon the mill management found out about how we were meeting and they started firing some of the Union men and women. The workers elected a shop committee and had them go to the mill superintendent to make a request of reinstatement. Well, you know how it was, the management fired the whole lot of them. Then they all voted 'Strike' and they walked out. Gee, it was a swell sight.'³²

Vorse's description of the beginnings of the strike was, for the most part, factually accurate. The Gastonia strike was indeed prompted by the firing of union members, by the refusal of the mill to recognize the union. What was important to Vorse's view of the strike was her emphasis on the unity which characterized the initial call to leave the mill. She wrote of a collective voice calling out, "Strike," a voice which demanded unionism and the right of workers to organize. She wanted to capture that unity which was so important to the beginnings of a strike, that shared conviction that transformed itself into a call for unionism. The sense of workers thinking and acting together profoundly affected Vorse in every strike that she had witnessed. She saw workers transformed from a group of diffused

individuals to a working, cooperating unit as the most powerful and moving manifestation of a strike. When Deane says, "Gee, it was a swell sight," he is voicing the same wonder and excitement that motivated Vorse to make labor her life's work.

Although Vorse exhibited a strong belief in solidarity and collectivism in her work, it would be misleading to interpret her understanding of the strike as a call for class revolt. In his proletarian enthusiasm, Mike Gold called the novel a "burning and imperishable epic," but Sinclair Lewis had a more insightful view of Vorse's intentions.³³ He described Vorse's workers as "union members who do not know that there is an international labor movement. They are Communists who have never heard of Russia."³⁴ Simply because Vorse wrote of the Communist-backed strike at Gastonia did not mean she was embracing the Party Line. In fact, Vorse's work was characterized by a distinct lack of Marxist dogma and rhetoric. A New Masses critic attacked Strike! because "the communist drive that ignited the smouldering fire into roaring flames in Gastonia is missing. . . ."³⁵ Fer Deane, the Communist organizer, was portrayed as an ambivalent character, afraid and uncertain, courageous and ultimately devoted to the workers. His speeches are curiously absent of Marxist theory and terminology. He was, according to Vorse, a performer, not a Communist ideologue. Vorse's workers walked for unionism, not for class revolt. And the lack of Communist theory in her work was consistent with her antipathy toward Communism. Although she often travelled in radical circles and listed among her friends such ardent Communists as John Reed and Lincoln Steffens, Vorse never embraced the Party. She explained her feelings about Communism in her reminiscences:

I didn't swallow it whole . . . because I felt it was a very gloomy sort of thing, and because I saw in it, in centralized, control, a very dangerous thing that could easily be a tyranny.³⁶

Vorse came to see the Communist Party as "a bunch of dopes," a group of hypocrites with "no intellectual integrity."³⁷ The lack of Communist belief which one finds in Vorse's interpretation of the strike and in her personal theories is important in undermining traditional notions about the Gastonia novels. Vorse's novel, the first of the group, fell short of proletarian expectations. Her work was by no means the story of class revolt which Mike Gold and The New Masses had been calling for since the early twenties. Vorse's novel sprang from her concern for labor and the southern millhands, not from her desire to advance literary Communism.

If Vorse was not interested in creating a burning Marxist epic work, what were her intentions in writing Strike!? Her interpretation of the beginnings of the strike indicate her basic humanitarian concerns. She painted a picture of desperate millhands driven by a desire for better wages and working conditions. She wrote of insensitive millowners and an unfeeling, ignorant public who see the millhands simply as undeserving of a decent existence. In her novel, Vorse sought both to explain the desperation of the workers and to challenge traditional attitudes about the millhands and their role in the villages. In describing the aims of her life's work, Vorse would later observe, "I wanted to work on telling about how workers lived with a view to immediately better conditions under our prevailing system."³⁸

Vorse was representative of a group of reformers in the late twenties who travelled South to aid the displaced textile workers. Along with labor writers like Vorse came sociologists like Louise

Leonard McLaren and Lois MacDonald who founded the Southern Summer School for Women Workers.³⁹ MacDonald, like Vorse, had travelled through the South observing the plight of textile workers. She contributed several articles about the unrest in textile mills to the Nation as well as writing a significant work on the mill villages--Southern Mill Hills: A Study of Social and Economic Forces in Certain Mill Villages.⁴⁰ As historian Mary Frederickson points out, MacDonald's work with the Southern Summer School was a culmination of her reform efforts. Frederickson sees the Summer School as representing:

. . . a unique effort at female cooperation across class lines. Each summer from 1927 to World War II, the staff of the school sought to provide young women workers from textile, garment, and tobacco factories with the analytic tools for understanding the social context of their lives, the opportunity to develop solidarity with each other, and the confidence for full participation in the emerging Southern labor movement.⁴¹

In order to understand Vorse's stance in Strike!, it is important to be aware of the reform and labor concerns which were embodied in movements such as the Southern Summer School. For Vorse, although she had radical ties throughout her life, was not committed to class revolution, but reform within the confines of the system. In Strike! she set out to document the problems of the Southern textile workers in a manner which would convey the pathos and tragedy of the combined labor struggles of the Piedmont. Just as MacDonald and McLaren were drawn to the South every summer to respond to the needs of working women, so was Vorse drawn to the strikes of the South in an attempt to publicize the injustices suffered by labor. The final lines of the novel embodied Vorse's commitment to follow labor in America--". . . wherever they, the workers went, whatever their destination might be, he had to go with them."⁴²

Like Mary Heaton Vorse, Sherwood Anderson was drawn to the South in the early years of the Depression to get "into touch with some of the men and women there who are in the labor movement . . . to join them, hang around them."⁴³ Unlike Vorse, Anderson came to the South as a romantic adventurer and as a newly committed activist trying to comprehend the labor outbreaks in the region. Beyond Desire was the result of Anderson's observations of the problems and people of the southern textile mills. It is a book which, like Strike!, cannot be labelled simply as a Marxist call for proletarian revolution. Rather, Beyond Desire reflected Anderson's wish to return to his working class roots, to understand the uncertainty and disorder of labor in America in the early years of the Depression.

Reviewers responded to Beyond Desire much as they had responded to the majority of Anderson's work in the late twenties and early thirties. Anderson was confused; he was inconsistent, he was "still groping."⁴⁴ Anderson's response to the criticism is important for understanding his general reaction to the social upheaval that strikes like the one at Gastonia fostered. Anderson wrote to his publisher Tom Smith of Liveright:

I have tried to write the story of a confused civilization and I think the critics have been up to their old trick of thinking that a writer who writes of a confused and puzzled man is necessarily himself confused. You would think, Tom, some of these critics have found a definite formula for the good life. If they have, I wish to God they would come out with it.⁴⁵

The critics did indeed have a formula for Anderson. They expected him either to regain the artistry of Winesburg, Ohio or to come out as a full-fledged Communist. Yet Anderson could do neither. In 1933 Anderson was to produce Death in the Woods, a book of short stories which rank among his best; but for Anderson to return to the days of

Winesburg, Ohio was impossible. Anderson was a romantic, driven by a desire to create continually new art. As for Anderson becoming a Marxist, the possibility was remote. He did not have the mind for the political theory and fervent devotion of the Communists. Rather, his social consciousness in the late twenties and early thirties was largely influenced by his wife, social worker Eleanor Copenhaver, whose interest and concern with labor conditions in the South infected Anderson. It gave a new direction to his writing, away from the concerns of the little magazines and back to his first love--the common, puzzled American.

A variety of forces drew Anderson's interest to the strike at Gastonia. His work as a country editor in Marion, Virginia, had renewed his feeling for the southern mountain people. His visit to Elizabethton, Tennessee, during the 1929 strike there had allowed him to see firsthand the desperate conditions of millworkers. In Gastonia, however, he realized that there was something different from the other strikes in the Piedmont. The presence of Communists in the tiny North Carolina town had brought fear to all of the South. In Beyond Desire, Anderson captured that widespread sense of fear which characterized the beginnings of Gastonia. He wrote:

There was a strike of mill workers in a mill town in North Carolina and it wasn't just an ordinary strike. It was a communist strike and word of it had been running through the South for two or three weeks. 'What do you think of it . . . it's at Birchfield, [Gastonia] North Carolina . . . actually. These communists have come into the South now. It's terrible.'⁴⁶

For Anderson, the strike was anything but terrible. Like many others, Anderson believed that significant changes were taking place in America in the early years of the Depression. The series of volatile strikes in the South represented a break "with the ordinary problem of middle-class people in love, etc." that Anderson believed characterized both

the literary and cultural climate of the twenties.⁴⁷ If the strike at Gastonia challenged the conventional attitudes of conservative southerners, Anderson reasoned, then let the upheaval begin. He was bored with the twenties. His restless romantic spirit wanted "to find things and people to love, to feel love, to feel life struggling in people."⁴⁸ Anderson's description of the beginnings of the strike conveyed the sense of excitement and unrest which catapulted Gastonia immediately to the public eye. The Communist aspect of the strike had brought feelings of desperation and terror to those who feared "foreign agitators" and feelings of hope and nervous optimism to those who were ready for things to break wide open in America, for the very foundations of the country to be shaken. Anderson saw the rift which the strike fostered as healthy. After the slumber of the previous nine years, America was alive again.

Simply because Anderson emphasized the Communist element of the strike did not signify that Anderson himself had made the conversion to Communism. Despite pressure from the growing numbers of writers and critics who were turning to Marxism in the beginnings of the Depression, Anderson was never comfortable with Communism. He did sign his name to many of the series of declarations sponsored by The New Masses and he did attend his share of meetings calling for revolution. But Anderson was attracted more by the feelings of change and dissatisfaction voiced by the Communists than their formal dogma. The Communist movement was representative of the new unsettled, volatile spirit of America. Writing to Roger and Ruth Sergel immediately before his immersion in southern mill towns, Anderson explained, "I'm not planning to go into the Communist Party or anything. I am only taking it as an adventure, the sweetest one I know to go into."⁴⁹ Anderson was far more interested in

the participants of the strike than the Marxist ideologues who came down from New York to interpret the strike at Gastonia as class revolt. The Communists were, according to Anderson, often guilty of manipulation. Having had no immediate stake in the strike, they, like other intellectuals (and he included himself among them), whom Anderson had questioned, would "go and stir them [workers] up. Out they come and presently get licked. Then we go comfortably off."⁵⁰ Anderson did not want his role to be linked with unconcerned, outside organizers. He wanted to become immediately involved in the confused lives of the workers. For they were his subjects, they were what sustained his writing.

In Anderson's description of the beginnings of Gastonia, we see his concern for explaining the strike through the eyes of the workers. Anderson wrote of the impact of the strike throughout the South. A tramp, one of the many roaming and displaced individuals of the early depression, tells of his experiences at Birchfield (Gastonia). He talks of going to the town to scab, but after witnessing the shooting of the singing woman at Birchfield (Ella May Wiggins), he realizes that he cannot cross the picket line. Anderson powerfully captured the discontentment of people throughout the South who had heard of the brutality at Gastonia.

The tramp Red Oliver heard talking in the tramps' jungle was blue with wrath. It may be that, after all, such shots heard here and there, at factory gates, at mine entrances, on picket lines before factories--deputy sheriffs--the law-protection of property . . . it may be they do echo and reecho.⁵¹

Anderson shifted the events of Gastonia to create a mood of rage and frustration around which displaced workers could rally. Ella May Wiggins was not killed until the very end of the strike, and yet Anderson chose to dramatize her death in the first three weeks of the strike in his

fiction. He compressed the drawn out violence which did not materialize until the strike had become over a month old into the beginnings of the walk-out. And he did this to add to the feelings of desperation and helplessness which characterized the Gastonia strike. Workers could only impotently watch as law officers and the Committee of One Hundred beat them and destroyed their supplies. The tramp's anger, his blue but helpless wrath, was indicative of the reaction of many workers at Gastonia. The tramp is a typical Anderson character--flawed and confused, yet possessing a strange integrity and feeling for his fellow man which the reader must admire.

However, the tramp is but a minor character in the drama that Anderson attempted to create in Beyond Desire. The protagonist of the novel, Red Oliver, embodies the confusion of the tramp and the confusion that Anderson ultimately felt in trying to interpret the times. Red is a youth desperately searching for some sort of meaning in the labor struggle at Gastonia. He decides to become a Communist for mixed reasons; and he decides to become a martyr out of the desperation of the moment. He sees the strike as "the struggle of all men," yet at the same time he concludes that he is a "Silly ass" caught up in something that he does not understand.⁵² Red's last thoughts before challenging the National Guard soldier, a boy equally reluctant and uncertain, are muddled and noncommittal--"What the hell"⁵³ Red's death is a symbol of the beginnings and end of Gastonia; it is a futile act of defiance in a strike which is doomed to fail. When Red confronts the soldier out of a confused sense of pride and devotion to the cause, the boy has no choice but to shoot the troubled youth. Anderson was not concerned with class wars or revolution in his interpretation of

the beginnings and causes of Gastonia. Rather, he attempted to salvage something from the defeat of laborers in the South by expressing his compassion for the scores of workers in strikes, workers who continued to be crushed by the economically and politically powerful mills.

Anderson's humanitarian concern for the worker in the South was voiced by many intellectuals of the time. The late twenties fostered a growing awareness among Americans of the plight of the working people in the South. A wave of books describing the horrors of textile conditions circulated in the early years surrounding the Depression-- I Go South: An Unprejudiced Visit to a Group of Cotton Mills, Cotton Mill People of the Piedmont: A Study in Social Change, and Welfare Work in Mill Villages, for example.⁵⁴ Intellectuals in leading liberal magazines changed from talking about lost values to talking about unions. Paul Blanshard, a contributor to The Nation, was indicative of many writers who, like Anderson, wanted to document the uncertain struggle of workers in textile strikes. On Gastonia, Blanshard's conclusions were surprisingly similar to Anderson's.

The workers in the strike only know that they are fighting for a better life. They do not know the difference between one union and another, and for them 'communism' is simply another epithet. . . . They hear with blank faces phrases about international solidarity and class power. . . . They are tired, undernourished, and uneducated, but even the employers admit that they are becoming aware of their own degradation.⁵⁵

One sees in Blanshard the same desire to portray the workers in human terms, to both describe their ignorance and their courage. Blanshard and Anderson voiced the concerns of many Americans. They spoke of the dissatisfaction with Communistic solutions to the problems of the Depression, and at the same time they realized that the dilemma of the worker in America had to be confronted. Anderson's concerns would

later be voiced by a significant group of Americans in the Depression, ranging from President Roosevelt to the men on the breadlines. They all came to realize one fundamental idea--Attention must be paid to workers in America.

III

"Solidarity forever,
Solidarity forever,
Solidarity forever,
For the Union makes us strong!"⁵⁶
(Strike song, National Textile Workers Union,
1929)

If Mary Heaton Vorse and Sherwood Anderson failed to produce the revolutionary proletarian work that Party members called for, Dorothy Myra Page and William Rollins Jr. succeeded in writing novels with a clear Communist message. They did not share the reservations of Vorse and Anderson concerning the manipulative and at times totalitarian aspects of Communism. Rather, they immersed themselves in the Party line. Page, a native southerner from Virginia, had been involved in radical politics throughout the late twenties. She worked as an organizer for the YWCA in Virginia in the early twenties but became dissatisfied with the conservative attitudes of its leadership. She then left the South, working as an organizer for the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America in Philadelphia and St. Louis, and eventually went on to earn a doctorate in sociology from the University of Minnesota in 1928.⁵⁷ Her 1929 doctoral dissertation, Southern Cotton Mills and Labor, was a culmination of her involvement and observations of southern textile workers. This work marked the beginnings of her association with a Communist press that printed many of the Marxist tracts of the thirties. Page would remain close to the Party

throughout the Depression, maintaining strong ties with the American Communist Party and Moscow as well as writing three Marxist works--Gathering Storm, Soviet Main Street, and Moscow Yankee.⁵⁸

Rollins' radical development was less clearly defined than Page's. Rollins served in the Ambulance Corps during World War I after which he began his literary career as a short story writer.⁵⁹ He became involved in radical circles around the time of the Depression, covering the Gastonia trial for The New Masses.⁶⁰ While at Gastonia, Rollins cultivated friendships with such prominent Party members as Gastonia strike organizer Fred Beal. The Shadow Before catapulted Rollins into the center of the movement toward literary Communism in the 1930s. It was proclaimed one of the finest examples of proletarian literature and established Rollins as a spokesman for the genre. Although their participation in Marxist politics and literature differed, Page and Rollins shared a common conviction: a belief that literature should and would contribute to a revolutionary, classless society.

Gathering Storm represented Dorothy Myra Page's efforts to combine the labor unrest of the first part of the twentieth century into a cohesive revolutionary movement. The book begins before World War I in the mills of North Carolina, signaling the growing unrest of the twentieth century. At the outset of the novel, a grandmother demands that her granddaughter continue fighting for equality and justice. The novel continues through World War I and the twenties. Page addressed the major radical issues of the times--the business motives of the war, the debate between Communism and Socialism, the battle for unions in Chicago and New England, and the Bolshevok revolution. She painted a picture of dissatisfied workers searching for a society which would

reward them for their sacrifices.

The unrest of the workers and their understanding of the need for action culminated in the strike at Gastonia. Page interpreted the beginnings of Gastonia as the long awaited realization among workers that their role was changing. Speaking through a fictional leader of the strike, she captured the imagery and ideology which is fundamental to her work:

'This day,' Tom declared, 'will go down in history. The day that southern mill hands started their Declaration of Independence from mill slavery. This strike must spread through all of Gaston County, the biggest textile center in the world. It must start walk-outs throughout the entire southern region! 'N we'll get support from all over this country, 'n from all parts of the world. You'll see.'⁶¹

One notices in Page's description of the beginnings of Gastonia the absence of a Communist organizer like Fred Beal. However, the absence of a Beal-type character does not mean that there was a lack of Communist sentiment in Page's novel. Rather, Page described the strike in revolutionary terms. She created a picture of a rising and restless proletariat declaring that it will no longer accept the "slavery" of capitalism. Tom is a southern mill worker who has gone north where he learns Marxist dogma. He returns to lead his fellow workers in a revolt which will become a symbol of the awareness and power of the proletariat. Page's idea of a "gathering storm" was a metaphor for her Marxist interpretation of the strike. It was a storm which would sweep across the globe, spreading the word of worker solidarity and the benefits of Communism.

The optimistic nature of Page's interpretation of Gastonia reflected, in part, the changes which would define truly "proletarian" literature. Marxist critics and intellectuals of the thirties were

looking for works which at once captured the problems of workers and spoke of the implications of a classless society. The world was changing, devoted Communists argued, and art must both reflect and further the revolutionary cause. Joseph Freeman, in his introduction to Proletarian Literature in the United States, defined the aims of revolutionary literature:

The revolutionary movement in America--as in other countries--is developing a generation which sees the world through the illuminating concepts of a revolutionary science. . . . Out of the experiences and the science of the proletariat, the revolutionary poets, playwrights, and novelists are developing an art which reveals more forces in the world than the love of the lecher and the pride of the Narcissist. For the first time in centuries we shall get an art that is truly epic, for it will deal with the tremendous experiences of a class whose world-wide struggle transforms the whole of human society.⁶²

Freeman's definition of the goals and aims of proletarian literature sheds light on the larger-scale concerns of Marxist writers in the thirties. Proletarian writers, those writers who adhered to the idea that they were Communists first and artists second, came to the conclusion that their work was a link in the world-wide transformation to Marxism. They believed that they were part of a radical change in the very nature of political and social institutions. Page's belief in art as an instrument of social change influenced her interpretation of *Gastonia*. She saw the strike as the beginnings of a proletarian class revolt which would spread among workers throughout the world. Explaining the optimism of radicals in the thirties, Page later recalled, "We were young and enthusiastic and you know, we just thought that things were gonna happen faster . . . that the working people were going to get control of their lives."⁶³

Page was concerned with creating a universal message: an archetypal strike that would embody the problems of all workers. In her

depiction of the conflict at Gastonia, therefore, she changed the facts of the strike to suit her broader themes. For Page, the issue of race and worker solidarity was crucial for developing her larger theme of worker cooperation and unity. She transformed Gastonia into a strike which at once symbolized the emancipation of southern workers from the slavery of the mills and from the slavery of their old demon--racism. In her novel white and black workers realize that they must unite:

At all once Jema and George felt more at home with each other, 'You know our ways in the south 'n how slow folks are to change. This black 'n white comin' together feels a lil' strange at first. But it's the only way. I'm sky blue certain of that. We want you in our union. Tell the Hollow folks that. We'll stand by 'em 'n we want 'em to stand by us.'⁶⁴

Page was involved personally with the interracial aspects of unionism. Her experiences in Philadelphia and St. Louis confirmed her belief that unionism was "a freedom to be fought for and won, black and white alike."⁶⁵ However, Page's transformation of the strike into an interracial struggle ignores the facts of Gastonia. Liston Pope, after interviewing the superintendent of the Loray Mill, learned that approximately one per-cent of the 2,200 employees at the mill were black.⁶⁶ Fred Beal could not understand why Communist theorist Albert Weisbord wanted him to "emphasize the Negro Question."⁶⁷ Beal explained to Weisbord "that there had been only two Negroes working in the mill and they had fled when the strike started."⁶⁸ Page most certainly knew that blacks did not play any role in the strike at Gastonia. However, to write of a strike of an all white work force would not suit Page's didactic ends. In her work, she wanted to create a movement which transcended racial barriers, which brought workers together toward one common cause--unity and solidarity against the heartless millowners. Page wrote of a strike where black and white workers must depend on

each other if they are to succeed. Divided, they are defeated. As their marching song declared, they came to realize that it was the union that made them strong.

The "Negro Question" had been a major concern for the Communist Party throughout the Depression. In 1929, the Comintern directed the American Communist Party to "come out openly and unreservedly for the right of Negroes to national self-determination . . . in the southern states. . . ." ⁶⁹ The South was the key to the Party's success both in incorporating blacks into their programs and in eliminating the racial barriers that divided southern workers. Page's use of the inter-racial issue hence fit into the problems the Party was addressing in the early Depression. In fact, her novel reads almost as if it was written to promote the Party platform.

Page was representative of the new breed of writers who developed in the thirties. Although she had been interested in fiction since her days in college, her primary orientation was political rather than literary. She had seen the injustices of the working class in America and she was determined, through her art, to remedy those problems. But unlike Mary Heaton Vorse, Page was not a reformer, but a revolutionist. She believed that the capitalist system had to be overthrown before workers could begin to see any meaningful changes in their existence. She had learned a valuable trait from her contact with the conservative YWCA. She wrote:

We had been trained to believe that social relations would right themselves through Peace and Persuasion, through changing hearts one by one. Finally, for me there was no going on. The theory simply did not work. The system was stronger than individuals, and the solution depended on changing the system itself. ⁷⁰

Page's novel centers around her belief in furthering the revolution which

she and her fellow Communists believed was imminent. When Page distorted the facts of the strike and gave workers Marxist motives which they did not understand, she was simply obeying the higher call to the revolution. For Page, Marx was far more important than art or verisimilitude. Still, one cannot deny the deeply felt concern and understanding for the working class which is present in Page's novel. Her experience as an organizer and as a participant in worker battles gave Page an intimate view of the problems of the proletariat.

Although William Rollins Jr. shared Page's belief in the importance of a classless society, his method of writing and theory of proletarian literature differed from Page's. In The Shadow Before, Rollins employed a more subtle and experimental approach in moving his readers toward Communism. Mary Heaton Vorse stated in her review of The Shadow Before that Rollins was able to capture "the moral feeling of a strike with its exaltations and its frustrations."⁷¹ Jumping from one perspective to another and using clippings from newspapers, Rollins depicted the ambivalence of his characters in much the same way as John Dos Passos did in U.S.A. Simply because Rollins was more experimental than the other Gastonia novelists did not mean that his objective in The Shadow Before was not primarily political. Rollins was a fellow traveller; and Marxist ideology remained at the heart of his work.

Rollins' general depiction of the strike differed significantly from the other Gastonia novels. He chose to combine the events at Gastonia with the New Bedford strike of 1927, and he transplanted the events of Gastonia to a northeastern setting. Some critics objected to Rollins' decision to move the strike from the South. Granville Hicks, despite sharing the overall enthusiasm of Marxist critics for The

Shadow Before, found fault in Rollins' juxtaposition of the two strikes.

It was pointed to me by a labor organizer that The Shadow Before, by transferring details of the Gastonia strike to a New England setting, portrayed a situation that is true to neither section. This, I am afraid, indicated the great weakness of the book; it is to a certain extent synthetic. . . . The book does not give an accurate cross-section of the various classes in a mill town. Rollins did not know enough to do what he so ambitiously attempted.⁷²

Hicks apparently did not know enough about Rollins to understand why he chose to portray Gastonia as a northern mill town. Rollins had indeed done his research on Gastonia. He covered the trial of Fred Beal for The New Masses and had developed a friendship with the Communist leader of Gastonia. Rollins understood the social dynamics both at Gastonia and in New England. Indeed, his work stood out because of his ability to write convincingly from the perspectives of mill workers, mill bosses, and mill owners. Hicks misread Rollins' work because he expected another account of the injustices at Gastonia. Rollins' motives were subtle but clear; he was determined to address the larger problems of the depression worker and his belief in Marxism.

To understand Rollins' reasons for combining Gastonia with New Bedford, one need only look to the wider range of workers which Rollins could incorporate into his work. Like Page, Rollins was concerned with the interracial issues with which the Party struggled. If Gastonia was a revolutionary strike, it was not a racially integrated strike. By transferring the venue to the Northeast, Rollins could include the dispossessed immigrants of New England into his work. The beginnings of the strike reveal a melange of ethnic groups working together. Rollins wrote:

Stella Lecinski was nineteen, the belle of the North End Poles. She made up her face with the skill of a girl on the hill and wore as becoming clothes. Stella led the singing before

meetings; she learned the strike songs in Portuguese and French as well as in English and Polish. Now, fellow workers; her voice was clear . . . now let's sing Solidarity Forever!⁷³

Rollins peopled his work with Irish and French and Portuguese and Italians, the melting pot of immigrants that was so much a part of New England. Although he did not include blacks, his strike had an international character. His novel spoke to more than the workers of America. He tried to capture the multi-ethnic voices of displaced workers throughout the world.

The idea of an international movement stood out clearly in Rollins' depiction of the beginnings of the strike. The walk-out is headed by an American Communist organizer, an Irish worker, and a French worker. Like the people of Page and Anderson and Vorse's work, they are tired of working "like hell nine hours a day" while their "kids are hungry." But Rollins was able to capture the bitterness and intensity of feelings of the strike in a manner which the other Gastonia novelists were not. He wrote of the crowd moving together to strike:

It rose here and there in the crowd. In English, Portuguese, French, Greek, Polish. Some remembered it dimly from the past and hummed it; some followed and hummed it; everybody made some kind of sound. And it blended, rose to the listening watchers at the windows, to the low hung clouds that scuttled darkly, silently by.

'THE INTERNATIONAL
SHALL BE THE HUMAN RACE!'⁷⁴

Speaking of his intentions in writing The Shadow Before, Rollins declared in The New Masses that he and his fellow proletarian writers "wrote simply to express reactions to sense that affected us profoundly."⁷⁵ One cannot deny that Rollins' view of the strike reveals a deeply felt sympathy and compassion for the workers' cause. But the implications of his treatment of the strike reach far beyond a simple "profound reaction."

His transformation of the strike into an international call for solidarity suggested his didactic concern in his novel. He was not an artist trying to explain his feelings; he was a Party loyalist trying to express his belief in the need for class revolt. Rollins admitted the essentially political nature of his writing when he explained that proletarian authors like himself "look forward to a classless society; and we write of all classes from that angle."⁷⁶

Although Rollins retained the revolutionary optimism which was characteristic of proletarian fiction, he broke with many of the techniques used by proletarian writers. Myra Page created a world of polar opposites; she wrote of evil bosses and courageous workers, of a petty ruling class and a virtuous group of revolutionaries. Rollins' world was far less clear cut than Page's. His workers were not always brave nor were they merely ignorant souls waiting for a Communist saviour. His bosses were flawed, but they were not inherently evil characters. Responding to the criticism that proletarian fiction was too black and white, Rollins wrote of his novel, "Of four important strikers, the organizer was a neurotic (to a lesser degree), the girl betrayed a man to sleep with a scab, a third was a dipsomaniac, and the fourth a homosexual."⁷⁷ Rollins' workers were far from the ideal, downtrodden people who are found in the pages of Gathering Storm. Rollins believed that the individual should not be portrayed as the single cause of the problems of the Depression. He had a larger villain in mind. In defining his theory of proletarian fiction, he wrote:

I believe the worse you make the boss personally, the more it removed the onus from the system and seems to put it on a peculiar individual; while make him a good fellow and then if things are still wet, the reader must look elsewhere for the cause. . . .⁷⁸

When Rollins spoke of "looking elsewhere for the cause," he spoke of examining the foundations of the capitalist system. Rollins was much more subtle than Page in his questioning of American political and economic institutions; however, his presentation of the problem was equally revolutionary. If, Rollins argued, the people who were involved in the strike were neither wholly evil nor good, then their predicament stemmed from a deeper root than human imperfection. Rollins concluded that the very nature of the capitalist system was at the heart of the conflict of the strike. And it was this system which Rollins implicitly forced his reader to understand, that had to be destroyed. Rollins was not as overt as the bomb-throwing revolutionaries who cried for class war during the Depression, but his message was equally potent. A classless society where the pressures of capitalist competition did not exist was Rollins' clear solution to the problems embodied in the strike.

Rollins was representative of the wave of Marxist writers in the thirties. Walter Rideout has observed that although not all of the proletarian writers were Communist Party members, they were "within the Marxian orbit."⁷⁹ The truly proletarian writers were sympathetic with Party concerns and willing to preach Party line in their works.⁸⁰ For writers such as Rollins, art was inextricably linked to political change; it was a weapon which could be sublimely used to further the cause of a classless society. Although Rollins admitted that his background was "completely middle-class," he was determined to interpret the problems of the worker in the revolutionary terms of the Party.⁸¹ Reflecting the optimism which was so much a part of the proletarian movement, Rollins concluded that eventually a working-class writer would appear who would be "best fitted to express the times."⁸² The worker was the true artist

and the truest art had to be concerned with the worker. And until the time came when the worker and the artist could live together in a society without class distinctions, Rollins believed that he would have to continue writing about the worker's plight; for that was the most compelling artistic and political issue of the time.

IV

"We're going to have a union all over the South,
Where we can wear good clothes and live in a better house.
Now we must stand together and to the boss reply
We'll never, no, we'll never let our leader die."⁸³
(Ella May Wiggins, Gastonia Balladeer, 1929)

The marriage of art and revolutionary politics, despite the optimistic urging of proletarian novelists and critics, was not always smooth. Writers who had developed in the apolitical climate of the twenties often had trouble adjusting to the proletarian movement of the thirties. The struggle between political dogma and art characterized the novels of Fielding Burke and Grace Lumpkin. Their lives reflected the inherent tensions one finds in their works on Gastonia. Burke was born in Kentucky, the daughter of two school teachers.⁸⁴ She attended college at Radcliffe and later moved to New York City where she began a career as a promising southern poet. By the mid-twenties, Burke's radical consciousness was developing. She was reading The Daily Worker and hungering for political action.⁸⁵ In 1925, she published Highland Annals under the pseudonym of Fielding Burke. This collection of short stories about the mountain people of North Carolina represented a break from the genteel poetry that she had been writing. Burke's tales detailed the intrusion of the mills on a simple and courageous way of life which she valued.⁸⁶ When Gastonia exploded in 1929, Burke went

there to investigate and was deeply moved by what she saw.⁸⁷ Call Home the Heart evolved out of her experiences and observations of Gastonia. Through the thirties, she published another radical novel, A Stone Came Rolling (1935) and aided the Party when she could, using her North Carolina mountain cabin as a retreat and as a temporary training school.⁸⁸ By the 1950s, however, Burke's political convictions had waned and she returned to writing poetry and local color sketches, leaving the battle for revolution to a younger generation.⁸⁹

Grace Lumpkin's writing career fluctuated much as Fielding Burke's did. She grew up in Georgia and later went to Columbia University where she studied journalism and began to forge a career as a short story writer. It was in New York in the late twenties that she began to learn about the Communist Party, participating in the Sacco and Vanzetti Defense Committee and writing for The New Masses. In 1929 she made her way to Gastonia where she took notes for her 1932 novel To Make My Bread. The thirties witnessed the rise and fall of Lumpkin's relationship with literary Communism. In 1935, she published another radical novel, A Sign for Cain, and followed that work with The Wedding in 1939, a novel void of radical sentiments. By the 1940s, Lumpkin had severed all associations and sympathies with the Party. She testified in 1953 to the Senate Permanent Investigating Sub-Committee that she had been forced by Marxist reviewers to write Communist propaganda.⁹⁰ Her 1962 novel, Full Circle, embodied the changes in her life; it spoke of her rejection of Communism and her return to the religion of her ancestors-- Christianity.

The lives of Burke and Lumpkin stand out in marked contrast to those of the other Gastonia novelists. Vorse and Anderson's concern

with the worker and labor endured throughout their lives. Page and Rollins would never recant their political beliefs, and their convictions endured from the radical heyday of the thirties to the radical witch-hunts of the fifties. However, Burke and Lumpkin were never sure about the place of their newly-found and undeveloped politics in their literature. They were confused artists in a confusing and volatile time. It is with this perspective that we must examine their respective treatments of Gastonia.

The critical response to Call Home the Heart is revealing in terms of defining the conflicts which Burke confronted in the writing process. The New Masses called the work "confused, struggling, half conscious."⁹¹ Burke was "from the petty bourgeoisie," she was "a friend of the working class but . . . still not wholly of it."⁹² V. J. Jerome of The New Masses, with the critical mind of the revolutionary, attacked Burke for her lack of militancy; her pen had not been "turned into a sword."⁹³ Elmer Davis, writing for the conservative Saturday Review of Literature, had an entirely different view of the novel. Rather than seeing the work as not militant enough, he attacked Burke's novel as part of the "Red Peril" of literary communism which was becoming increasingly more influential to young writers.⁹⁴ Transcending overtly political interpretations of Call Home the Heart, Robert Cantwell, a critic and novelist who was confronting many of the same questions as Burke, captured the essential conflict of the novel. He described the work as

. . . an excellent illustration of the difficulties which confront a novelist attempting to make his political and social convictions explicit rather than implicit in his writing. The problem it raises, or some variation of it, is a major literary problem of the moment. . . . Many writers who accept the need for a revolutionary correction of social evils are still uncertain, or perhaps completely baffled, as to how this belief can

be expressed dramatically in terms of action, without the loss of certain qualities they believe good writing should possess.⁹⁵

How does one overtly relay a revolutionary message and still write an aesthetically sound novel? That was the question which haunted Burke as she sat down to write her first novel. Her Call Home the Heart spoke with scorn about novels that "only talk about life."⁹⁶ She was determined to do more than talk.

Burke's interpretation of the beginnings of the strike revealed her fusion of dogma and art. Her workers are indeed eager for some sort of change; they suffer under poverty, over-work, and disease. They are fine mountain people who have been broken by the mill. And yet it is only when the spark of Communism comes that the workers begin to unite. A Communist leader identifies the "monsters" that the down-trodden workers have been unable to identify:

You will know that honor, that compassion, that wisdom, are not denied a man because he is a communist. Who has a greater claim to honor than one who leads a fight against a system that is making honor among men more impossible with every day that it totters on its rotten base? Who can have greater pity than one who would lead men forever out of the need of pity? Who is more wise than the man who knows when a change in the world is due and sets forth to make that change before delay has wrecked mankind?⁹⁷

Burke's Communist speeches indicated her struggle between two worlds. The transition from her story of mountain people and their problems, which comprises well over half of the novel, to their radical awakening is abrupt. It seems as if Burke realized half-way into her work that the Party line had never been clearly articulated. The Communists are quickly introduced and commence to recite dogma from the outset of the strike. This view of the beginnings of the strike belies the fact that Fred Beal made a conscious effort to exclude formal dogma from his initial organization efforts. He realized that the workers were ready

for unionism, but that they were not necessarily prepared to hear talk of class revolt. However, Burke's Communist rhetoric was not altogether earth-shattering. Her leaders speak in terms of the old values of "honor" and "compassion" and "wisdom." Their revolutionary dogma is tempered by a belief that Communism will allow workers to return to a world where the verities of pity, pride, and honor still had meaning. Burke's rhetoric was a curious blend of radical ideology and traditional morality. As Elmer Davis satirically commented, Burke could not "rid herself altogether of an unregenerate weakness for bourgeois standards of beauty and proportion--even for bourgeois virtues."⁹⁸

Although Burke stressed the Communist influence on the strike, she devoted the majority of the novel to the worker's response and role in the walk-out. Ishma Waycaster, the protagonist in the novel, was portrayed as an organizer whose efforts are crucial to the success of the strike. Ishma has left the confines of the mountains and her husband to see the world of the mill. She has been inspired by a local Marxist doctor to fight for the cause of revolution and the workers. And yet even as she realizes that she must fight for "the class of burden bearers," she harkens back to her husband and life in the mountains.

Yes, men would find their freedom, but how they would have to struggle for it! She couldn't keep her thoughts from drifting back to the mountains and their unquestioning slumber. Back there, 'mass-production' and 'mass-consumption' would fall like words from a foreign tongue. Imagine Britt as 'mass-conscious'! Her Britt.⁹⁹

Ishma's dilemma was, in many ways, similar to Burke's dilemma. She did not know whether her true allegiances lay with the mountains and its culture or the cause of radical political change. Ishma's initial involvement with the strike is tentative; she is not a ready convert

to Marxism, but an unsure worker caught between the traditions of her mountain heritage and the political unrest of the early Depression. In this sense, Burke captured the ambivalence which characterized workers' attitudes in the beginnings of the walk-out at Gastonia. It proved very difficult for workers who had previously little contact with unions and the problems of industrial existence to devote themselves suddenly to a strike. Burke wanted Ishma to be an ardent radical, an embodiment of the growing revolutionary spirit in the country. However, she appears as a perplexed worker, torn between two worlds. Commenting on the character of Ishma after her manuscript had been accepted by a conservative publisher, Burke admitted that her protagonist was "less 'subversive' than she had intended."¹⁰⁰

If Ishma was not as radical as Burke would have liked, she was important in another sense. In her depiction of the beginnings of the strike, Burke emphasized Ishma's work as an organizer, instrumental in bringing the millworkers together.

Weary days, and nights of too brief sleep, left her joy untouched. She was upheld by the supreme ecstasy, the consciousness of transmuting daily life into an ideal. She was part of the creative gesture, building a brighter world; a world so near that she could stretch her hands over the border and feel them tingling with its sun.¹⁰¹

By portraying a woman as integral to the success of the strike, Burke captured the historical dynamics of Gastonia. The work force in the textile industry was largely composed of women, and the success of walk-outs in textile mills depended on female participation. At the Loray Mill, Liston Pope observed that almost half of the workers involved in the strike were women and children and the women were "reported to have been the most outspoken and determined of the

strikers."¹⁰² Ella May Wiggins, the Gastonia balladeer, served the strike not only as an inspirational songwriter, but also as an important organizer. Bertha Hendrix, a millworker who was involved in the strike, captured the sense of growing awareness on the part of female workers. "We all went home that night," Hendrix remembered, "feeling that at last we were going to do something that would make things better for us workers."¹⁰³ Burke captured in her characterization of Ishma the growing consciousness and optimism which women were beginning to discover in their participation in the textile strikes.

Ishma's dual role as union organizer and displaced woman yearning for the simplicity of life in the mountains hints at the problematic nature of Burke's interpretation of Gastonia. Her view of Gastonia combined confused Marxist dogma with a passionate depiction of textile workers and their problems. However, the Communist ideology which ran throughout the work was neither as compelling nor as informed as the ideology one finds in Gathering Storm or The Shadow Before. Burke's work, despite her radical wishes, did not stand out as a revolutionary tract. Rather, it was a novel which was characterized by a feeling and understanding of workers and their confused reactions to the volatile events at Gastonia. This is especially true of her women characters. Sylvia J. Cooke has commented on the "pattern of feminist thinking" which is fundamental to Call Home the Heart.¹⁰⁴ In her portrayal of the independent and perplexed Ishma, Burke was much more convincing as a supporter of women's rights than as a party ideologue. It is not surprising that just as her character Ishma would return to the mountains for sustenance, so would Burke. To the mountain people, Burke gave her primary allegiance. Her relationship with Marxist

politics was but a phase in her lifelong concern with southern working women.

Grace Lumpkin's involvement with literary Communism was much more dramatic than Fielding Burke's. She immersed herself in radical circles from the late twenties to the end of the Depression only to break completely with the Party in the 1940s and disavow all of her ties with Marxism. In To Make My Bread, one sees the tension that was to characterize Lumpkin's stormy relationship with the Party. The novel was at once an exploration of the industrialization of the Piedmont and a call for social upheaval. Although Lumpkin's work won the Maxim Gorky award for best labor novel of the year, it was not the full-fledged radical effort which Marxist critics and writers were calling for in the thirties. Like Fielding Burke, Lumpkin was torn between her newly found political ideology and her belief in writing an aesthetically sound novel. Lumpkin's treatment of the strike at Gastonia reveals the problems of a writer in transition, attempting to break from her old values as she struggled with voicing the Party Line.

The transition to Marxist dogma was as abrupt in Lumpkin's life as it was in her novel. Her involvement with the Party began in the late twenties and she quickly became a devoted fellow traveller. The Party gave her a new direction, a life free of the conflicts and questions that an uncertain young writer in New York would have to confront. She later explained the cathartic effect of her relationship with Communism:

At first I felt free of old burdens. No more God. No more sin that brings guilt and shame. Patriotism was outmoded. I became international. Follow the Party Line and you are safe and secure. No need to feel responsibility for my neighbor. From birth to death the State would care for my neighbor. Forget the old moralities. There is a new morality, a revolutionary morality. I was free.¹⁰⁵

Lumpkin's view of Communism hinted at the reasons for her break from the compassionate novel of displaced mountain people to the revolutionary dogma which appears at the end of her work. She felt that the largely apolitical concerns of a twenties writer were insignificant in comparison to the international cause of class revolt. In the last section of the novel, those international concerns take over the lives of her characters. They change from desperate workers searching for a decent life to radicals who want nothing less than a transformation of the system under which they labor.

The beginnings of the strike in To Make My Bread marked the abrupt change in the novel from a story about the tragic lives of desperate mountain people who have gone to the mill to a story about the rise of the proletariat. In the first three-fourths of her book, Lumpkin documented the lives of a mountain family struggling to survive. She knew these people well, having travelled to the hills and to the mills throughout the Piedmont. "I have lived there and know the types of people who are my characters," she explained to a professor, "although I did not take my character straight from life; but made composite pictures from people I knew."¹⁰⁶ However, as the strike develops, the characters begin to come to the "realization that there was only one way out for them."¹⁰⁷ John Stevens, the radical ideologue in the novel, explains the only way out for the dispossessed workers:

'And the rich will never give it to us. We must take it for ourselves. You understand that? Take it for ourselves. They couldn't give it to us if they wanted to, even if they had that kindness your preacher once spoke about; for they have made something that is bigger than they are, bigger and stronger.'¹⁰⁸

Like the characters in Call Home the Heart, the characters in Lumpkin's work need the promptings of an experienced radical before they can

start their class revolt. Lumpkin's workers are unsure of their ability to make changes in their way of life. They ask Stevens, "Can it be done?" He replies, with the optimism of the revolutionary, "It has been done . . . though it isn't yet finished."¹⁰⁹ Through Stevens, Lumpkin demanded that the basis of the capitalist system must be destroyed before the workers' lives will improve. And it is with this ideology of solidarity and revolution that the strike begins.

Although Lumpkin ultimately changed the direction and ideology of her work, Marxist critics still remained dissatisfied with the dichotomy of To Make My Bread. Lumpkin had done her best to shed her existing values and come out as a revolutionary. But radical critics nonetheless faulted her for writing too much from her old perspective. As A. B. Magil of The New Masses argued,

a fundamental defect [of the book was that] . . . the author has written for the most part not from her present point of view as a revolutionist, but from the point of view of the backward workers she is describing.¹¹⁰

In other words, Lumpkin did not distance herself from the people about whom she wrote. A native southerner who had a long-standing concern for the textile workers, she could not help but tell their story in their terms. To demand Lumpkin to subjugate completely the workers' story was asking too much. She did not see the workers of the South in such condescendingly simple terms. Even if her primary goal was to further the cause of class revolt, Lumpkin realized that the experiences of her characters were fundamental to her work. She would never become so immersed in the Party that she could deny the worker's point of view.

In her depiction of the beginnings of the strike, we can see how Lumpkin assimilated her story of the displaced workers into her larger

revolutionary message. Although the Communist figure John Stevens plants the seeds of dissent into the minds of the workers, it is the workers themselves who take the first steps toward attacking the system. Lumpkin described the revolutionary spirit of the millhands as they walk out:

In the short time they had stood together they had felt something. They had felt a sense of standing up for each other. For so long each had been alone with his family striving after enough food to keep from starving, and enough clothes to keep from going naked. And they had been alone in that fight. Now they were going to stand together, side by side, and there came to them the feeling of strength.¹¹¹

In the strike, the transformation of the rising proletariat becomes complete. The workers realize that when they stand together, they gain a strength and confidence which allows them to battle with the hierarchy of the mill. John, the boy who is born at the beginning of the novel into the hopelessness of mountain life, takes his place as a leader of the strike. His sister, Bonnie, becomes the facsimile of Ella May Wiggins. Lumpkin placed the workers at the center of the strike, emphasizing their reactions to the walk-out rather than narrating the strike from the perspective of the Communist organizers.

As Lumpkin's workers became more involved in the strike, they began to address the larger issues. From his contact with the radical organizers of the strike, John became aware of the implications of winning the fight against the tyranny of the mill. He sees the strike as the beginnings of the class struggle which began in Russia before the war. When the mill preacher warns John of the futility of the strike, the young organizer responds, "But I know a place where the rich were even stronger, and the poor got the best of the fight."¹¹² His indoctrination into the politics of the strike forces John to see the

event in revolutionary terms. The strike becomes far more than a battle for better living conditions; it becomes a step in the world-wide effort to free America from the bondage of capitalism. Bonnie also awakens to the universal issues implicit in the strike. As the walk-out develops, she realizes that its success depends on participation from women and blacks. She asserts that "us women have got to fight hard, like the men."¹¹³ She goes on to speak of the importance of interracial participation in the strike:

'I'm a-talking about working together and fighting together. The marrying can take care of itself. We are all working people and I can see without looking very far that what Tom Moore says is true. That if we don't work with them, then the owners can use them against us. Where would we be if they went over to Stumptown and got them in our places? It's plain common sense that we've got to work together.'¹¹⁴

Through her characters, Lumpkin brought the larger concerns of the Party into her work. The themes of class revolt, interracial unity, and female involvement are incorporated into the strike in a subtle manner. The overt didacticism of Page and Rollins concerning Party issues did not appeal to Lumpkin. She was not prepared to include political tracts into her work. She allowed the workers to struggle with the issues of revolution and race, distancing herself from the narrative speeches for class revolt that one sees in Gathering Storm and The Shadow Before. Lumpkin's appraisal of A Sign for Cain, her 1935 novel with similar Communist themes, revealed the problems she had with injecting too much dogma into her art. Her radical novels of the thirties were written with "Communist propaganda . . . more important than literary or any other sort of merit."¹¹⁵ By allowing her characters to voice the concerns of the Party, Lumpkin maintained the appearance of an artist describing the growing class-consciousness of her characters.

Lumpkin's battle with art and radical politics embodied the conflict that all of the Gastonia novelists had to confront. The thirties had forced the novelists to break from the apolitical concerns of the twenties. But the line between writing a politically-concerned novel and mere political theory was tenuous. In her early outlines of To Make My Bread, Lumpkin considered the idea of ending the strike with the workers starving and defeated, waiting on breadlines for food and hope.¹¹⁶ Such an ending would have made a compelling picture of the Depression worker, but it would not have been a strong revolutionary statement. Lumpkin, like her fellow Gastonia novelists, wanted to salvage some hope from the circumstances of the strike. Another novel of a lost and defeated generation would sound too much like the mournful literary works of the twenties. An optimistic political statement of the changing attitudes of the Depression was clearly on Lumpkin's mind as she re-worked her novel. Gastonia could not be merely another casualty in the list of labor defeats of the twenties. It had to represent the beginning of the new class-consciousness of a troubled but hopeful decade.

V

It is not surprising that Gastonia became the rallying point for a group of writers searching to define the conflicts of a new decade. Gastonia posed in vivid terms the questions which writers, and indeed all of America, would have to confront in the Depression. What is the role of the American worker in society? What is the relationship between the worker and the entrepreneur? What are the fundamental faults of the American economic, political, and social system? What is the role of the writer in the midst of the turmoil of the Depression? Gastonia was a sign of the times, a distress signal which pointed to

the fact that America was beginning to come apart at the seams. On October 29, 1929, seven months after the beginnings of Gastonia, America would come to abruptly understand that there was something very wrong in Hoover's land of business. The people of Gastonia, North Carolina, knew that things were changing before the crash. The very foundations of their community had been shaken and neither the expulsion of the Communists nor the breaking of the union would erase the events of 1929.

The effect of the strike on the Gastonia novelists was not as direct or devastating as it was on the millworkers, but in some ways, it was equally profound. To be sure, the writers did not have to suffer through evictions and violence and hunger, but they did have to deal with the implications of the strike. All of the novelists shared one disturbing vision: they saw a group of workers who had asked for little more than equitable pay and a decent standard of living utterly defeated. However, in examining the novels, one does not see the defeat which the details of the strike suggest. For the Gastonia novelists, the strike had to transcend its sobering history. The workers had to in some way be redeemed; their story had to be told in a manner which would allow America to understand the greater issues of the tragedy at Gastonia. Each writer came to understand that the issues the strike raised were more important than the actual chain of its events. The determination and the sacrifices of the workers they had seen and read about could not be lost. As each writer sat down to create his or her vision of Gastonia, the problems of the millworkers and their future in America weighed heavily on their minds.

For Mary Heaton Vorse, the future of the worker was inextricably tied with the future of labor. In Strike!, Vorse emphasized that the

unionization of the workers was the single most important factor in allowing them to confront their substandard working conditions. Vorse denied the defeat of the strike by placing it in the context of the unending fight for organized labor in America. Gastonia was but a link in the chain of labor struggles to come in the Depression; it was a sign that workers could organize and eventually, Vorse argued, unionism would give them the opportunity to reap the well-deserved benefits of their labor. Sherwood Anderson did not see things as pragmatically as did Vorse. He was more concerned with the worker himself than the organization to which he belonged. The union was clearly important to Anderson, but his primary concern lied in defining the perplexing identity of the worker. Beyond Desire voiced Anderson's feeling for the worker, his belief in his courage and his sympathy for his flaws. Gastonia was the ideal battle ground for Anderson's puzzled American struggling with questions and forces which he did not completely understand.

For Dorothy Myra Page, the problems of Gastonia were symptomatic of the greater problems of the country. In her experiences as an organizer and as a teacher, Page saw a recurring theme in America. The system did not take care of its own; the rich got richer and the worker continued to lose ground. Page could see no remedy to the problem by working within the system. She believed that the structure of the system had to be changed. Gastonia represented to Page a sign that things could change, that the possibility of revolution and class-struggle did exist. William Rollins Jr. was not as deeply involved in the Party as Page. He shared little of her political experience and orientation. But he did share her disillusion with the American political system. He had seen the Gastonia defendants convicted without

any semblance of justice. In The Shadow Before, Rollins blamed neither the bosses nor the troubled workers for the problems of Gastonia: the system itself was the culprit and it had to be overthrown.

Born and raised with the same type of people whom they would meet at Gastonia, Fielding Burke and Grace Lumpkin faced similar dilemmas as they created their respective versions of Gastonia. They both wanted to capture the strong and untamed spirit of the mountain people who came down to the mills. And at the same time, they wanted to voice their newly found revolutionary beliefs. Neither Burke nor Lumpkin were sure whether the future of the workers rested on their unwillingness to accept defeat or their need to undermine the very foundations of the system under which they labored. As they struggled with radical ideology and their personal concern for the workers, Burke and Lumpkin came to one inescapable conclusion. The pandemonium of the Depression that Gastonia embodied was forcing changes and they could do nothing more than try to participate in those changes.

Just as the strike hinted at the changing concerns of America in the early years of the Depression, so did the literary response foreshadow some of the attitudes of the thirties. Mary Heaton Vorse and Sherwood Anderson called for recognition and dignity for the worker in America and pointed to labor as a crucial issue for the country in the thirties. By the end of the Depression, President Roosevelt had convinced the American people that the problems of the worker were the problems of America. Prompted by the desperation of the times and the Administration's recognition of the worker, union membership increased significantly by the late thirties. The Marxist orientation of Myra Page and William Rollins Jr. would become more and more

influential as the Depression wore on. The thirties were, as Harvey Klehr writes, the heyday of American Communism. Party membership among workers as well as intellectuals in the United States reached its peak in the Depression, and the Party came as close as it ever has to being a viable political entity. The ambivalence of Fielding Burke and Grace Lumpkin pointed both to the literary struggles of the period and the overall confusion which the Depression fostered. The Writer's Congress of 1935 mulled over the problems which Lumpkin and Burke faced and their conclusions were anything but unified. The leftist writers learned that there were no easy solutions to the problematic marriage of art and politics.

The attitudes and stances found in the Gastonia novels were but part of a broader American response to issues raised at Gastonia. The Gastonia novelists did not resolve the problems of the Depression nor did they represent completely the array of responses to the turmoil of the thirties. But they did capture in their works the sense of change and unrest and turmoil which the Depression came to symbolize. They heard in Gastonia the heart of America beating into another decade full of problems which the country could not envision in the prosperity of the twenties. In an insignificant milltown in North Carolina the novelists found the dynamics of a changing culture. They could offer no simple solutions; they could only write and wait as the wave of confusion which would be called the Great Depression engulfed the nation.

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¹¹¹Lumpkin, To Make My Bread, p. 333.

¹¹²Ibid., p. 367.

¹¹³Ibid., p. 335.

¹¹⁴Ibid., p. 350.

¹¹⁵Grace Lumpkin, June 3, 1971, response written on 1935 New York Post review of A Sign for Cain, The Grace Lumpkin Papers.

¹¹⁶Grace Lumpkin, "Notes on To Make My Bread," The Grace Lumpkin Papers, p. 3.

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