BOOK REVIEWS

Proletarian Writers of the Thirties. By David Madden, ed. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1968. 278 pp.

Material Covered:

This anthology of essays—written during the "radical" sixties—offers critical analyses and/or personal recollections of the writers of the Thirties and their novels, plays,and poetry. The contributor accurately define for those living in the Sixties what proletarian literature was really about. Essays include: Leslie Fiedler, Gerald Greene, Leo Gurko, Jack Conroy, Irving Howe, et al. Writers studied include: John dos Passos, Dalton Trumbo, B. Traven (the pure proletarian), Edward Dahlberg, Michael Gold, et al.

Usefulness for Scholarship:

Anyone researching the literature of this period would find the book useful—it provides insights into historical, political, and social influences behind "radical" writing. It would especially benefit those who are interested in correlating contemporary realism with the proletarian genre. This is a difficult book to skim; each essay needs careful reading. Good bibliography—especially in the Notes section at the end of the book.

Significant Quotations:

David Madden's introduction:

> *"Produced by a 'crisis generation,' proletarian literature is the most visible and identifiable of genres in the Thirties, and certainly the one which the 'protest' fraction [sic] of the present generation will find most relevant" (xvi).*

From Marcus Klein's "The Roots of Radicals":

> *"Proletarian literature was a literary rebellion within a literary revolution, to which it was loyal. It had as*

> *its aim refreshment of that revolution by way of bringing it to a knowledge of current realities" (p.137).*

From Frederick Hoffman's "Aesthetics of the Proletarian Novel":

> *"The American proletarian novel was often a strange mixture of native realism and sudden dips into ideological editorial or melodrama. Very few novelists were spared the awkward hesitation that a commitment to leftist necessities seemed to cause" (p. 186).*

From Leonard Kriegel's Dalton Trumbo's **"Johnny Got His Gun"**:

> *"... if the Thirties seems to be on the verge of becoming literarily fashionable once again, this, too, seems to be for the wrong reasons. The fact is that we continue to be embarrassed by the literature of the Thirties, treating it as an unwanted legacy discovered in some unlamented aunt's attic, some poor relative for whom we apologize with all sorts of gestures about her good intentions" (p. 106).*

Research Topics:

- The Proletarian Writer of the Thirties compared with the Realist Writer of the Eighties.
- Defining the Proletarian novel (strike novels, bottom-dog novels, novels of middle-class decay, and conversion novels).
- Comic Proletarian novelists (Do they exist?).
- Catholicism in Proletarian Novels.

Eileen Klink

Since Yesterday: The Nineteen Thirties in America. By Frederick Allen Lewis. New York: Bantam Books, 1939. 292pp.

Material Covered:

A compendium of events, people, places, and settings of the Thirties, this book offers information on:

1. chronology and impact of events on national and international levels–from the prelude to the Panic, September 3, 1929, through the outbreak of the war with Germany, September 3, 1939.

2. major political and business figures plus celebrities of the era–Hoover, Roosevelt, Hitler, Charles Lindbergh, Fred & Gracie Allen, etc.

3. influential organizations and unions.

4. statistical information and analysis.

5. day–to–day life—e.g., the books, magazines, and newspapers; films and radio programs; automobiles; fashions; the weather.

Usefulness for Scholarship:

Very valuable. It provides a detailed overview of the period, an indepth analysis of significant events, plus wonderful trivia. Written by someone who is reporting events he has just experienced, Allen's book is objective, factual, and informative. Includes quotations from major periodicals and magazines. Limited bibliography. Good index–sample entries: Labor unions, anti–semitism, bicycling, General Motors Corp., **The Good Earth**, gangsters.

Significant Quotations:

> *"Ever since, in* **Only Yesterday**, *I tried to tell the story of life in the United States during the nineteen–twenties I have had it in the back of my mind that some day I might make a similar attempt for the nineteen–thirties. I definitely began work on the project late in 1938 and had it three–quarters done by the latter part of the summer of 1939, though I did not yet know how the story would end. The outbreak of war in Europe provided an obvious conclusion, since it promised to end an era perhaps as definitely as the Panic of 1929 had ended one. By an odd chance, the declaration of war upon Germany by the British and French governments took place ten years to a day after that September 3, 1929, which I had already made the subject of my first chapter. It gave me a turn to realize how precisely the course of events had provided me with a decade to chronicle." (xi)*

> *"In this panorama of the Thirties, Frederick Lewis Allen combines an eye for the significant trivia or everyday existence with a facility for neatly dissecting the political monoliths of the era." (publisher's blurb)*

Ideas for Research:

- Attitudes toward Prohibition–considered second most serious problem in U. S. (Administration of Justice was first; Unemployment was eighteenth).
- Diversions during the Depression: miniature golf, tree–sitting, free–wheeling, backgammon, monopoly.
- Hoovervilles.
- Changes in morality from 1929 to 1939.
- Writers's Project of the WPA.
- The image of the businessman in the 1930's.

Eileen Klink

The New Deal. By Conkin, Paul K. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1967

Material Covered:

Chapter 1 of Conkin's book is a study of Roosevelt's personality and of his political activities during the thirties. The book starts with a quite detailed description of Roosevelt's life as a child, student, husband, father, friend, governor, etc., trying to pinpoint especially those personality traits which would later affect his political career, his policies and the life of the country.

The remaining three chapters of the book are dedicated to the analysis of Roosevelt's New Deal programs—their successes and failures, their influence on labor unions, on the political Left and on the Republican Party.

Thesis:

The thesis of the book is that the New Deal was an extremely "personal enterprise [whose] disparate programs were unified only by the personality of Franklin D. Roosevelt." Conkin argues that Roosevelt never really understood the intricacies of the capitalist economy. His acts were more a product of a circumstantial search for fairness than a carefully calculated political program. Conkin points out that "he did not have the substance, the wisdom for great leadership. He never did. But he had the form, and in 1932 the form seemed more important that the substance."

The depression of 1937 proved that Roosevelt, despite all relief actions, work programs and regulative laws, was powerless to prevent the repetition of an economic crisis, having surrendered to the pressures of a free market society.

Ideas for Research:

- The role of the Supreme Court during the Roosevelt Years.
- The divisions within the Democratic Party during Roosevelt's second term.
- The 1937 depression and the U.S. involvement in World War II.
- Welfare capitalism and its inhibition of the political Left.
- The Roosevelt Recovery Acts (CWA, CCC, TVA, NIRA, etc.).

I would recommend Conkin's book especially for those who wish to have an idea of (1) what many of the relief programs were like and (2) why, where and when they failed or succeeded. The

book also ends with a note on New Deal historiography, which could be very useful for further research.

Donald Richardson

Faulkner: A Biography. By Joseph Blotner. New York: Random House, 1974.

WILLIAM FAULKNER AND THE THIRTIES

Until the publication of **The Sound and the Fury**, October 7, 1929, William Faulkner knew more rejection than acceptance. **Sartoris**, published early the same year, had received mixed reviews, and Faulkner was "disappointed and discouraged by its reception" (Blotner: 236). However, **The Sound and the Fury** granted him his first taste of critical acclaim and international fame; he was heralded as a new Euripides, and his book was compared with Greek tragedy. Unfortunately, into enjoyed only lukewarm sales. Still, this masterpiece unfolded a literary dynasty which ultimately earned him a claim to being one of America's greatest authors; his tales of the Sartoris/Snopes clan were just beginning. Prior to 1930, Faulkner had published poetry and short stories in literary magazines (**The Mississippian, The Double Dealer,** and **The Four Seas**), and although his talent was recognized by some, such as Sherwood Anderson and Sinclair Lewis, he appeared to be living up to his sobriquet, "Count No Count." Residents of Oxford, Mississippi, and most of the Faulkner family viewed him only as an inveterate story teller who could not hold down a job, a somewhat arrogant loner. The decade of the thirties would prove that these folks were wrong.

Having married his childhood sweetheart, Estelle Franklin, in April 1929 (after her divorce from Cornell Franklin, a lawyer in Shanghai), Faulkner entered the thirties supporting a wife with extravagant tastes, two children, Victoria (Cho–Cho) and Malcolm (both by Esther's first marriage), a newly acquired house (Rowan Oak—from Frazer's **The Golden Bough**, and family servants. To ensure a guaranteed wage, he was forced to work at a local power plant, but he would often return from his shift with pages of completed manuscript, and **As I Lay Dying** (1930) was supposedly written while he was at work.

As the need for income became the forced inspiration behind his prolificacy, Faulkner drew from his "lumber room" of characters and plots to create pieces derived from earlier works. Rejected stories were revised and resubmitted at the rate of six or more per month; however, in 1930, he received only six acceptances out of thirty–seven submissions.

Sinking further into debt, Faulkner churned out even more "potboilers" between 1930 and 1931. "Carcassonne," "A Rose for Emily," "Smoke," and "Thrift" appeared in **Forum** and **Saturday Evening Post**, and he earned his first "real money"—$750 for two stories. With each sale, Faulkner paid off accumulated debts and continued restoration on his home. "Hitting another drought in sales," he would fall into debt again, an even as Sinclair Lewis, in his acceptance of the Nobel Prize, hailed him as the foremost writer in this country, Faulkner was hocking a $10 gold piece to pay a storekeeper his bill (Blotner: 277). After the publication of **Sanctuary** (1931), recognition of his growing literary stature came in the form of an invitation to a gathering of noted Southern writers held in Charlottesville, in October 1931. The literary assemblage included Thomas Wolfe, Stark Young, Sherwood Anderson, and Ellen Glasgow, and shortly after this meeting, Faulkner gained entrance to the New York publishing world, accompanying Harrison Smith, his publisher, on the trip north. Considered a "lion" in literary circles, Faulkner became acquainted with Bennett Cerf, Dorothy Parker, Ernest Hemingway, Nathanael West, Lillian Hellman, and Dashiell Hammett.

On this trip, Faulkner was introduced to a new genre as well. Always looking for ways to make money, the author eagerly accepted contracts offered during this visit. Promised $300 for one piece, $1000 for another, he discovered that the most lucrative sums could be made writing movie scripts, and he agreed to script a film for Tallulah Bankhead for $10,000. A new lifestyle emerged from this effort, and throughout the rest of the thirties, Faulkner traveled regularly between Oxford, Mississippi, and Hollywood, California.

On a personal level, life proceeded in roller–coaster fashion depending on where the writer was and with whom. In Oxford, there were periods of tranquillity ar Rowan Oak, and only in this environment could he attain a semblance of peace where days were spent writing or flying (a life–long passion), or in family or community activities. During his tumultuous marriage to Estelle, there were traumatic events such as the death of their nine–day–old daughter, Alabama, in 1931, interspersed with times of joy—the birth of another daughter Jill, in 1933.

Throughout this period, and for the rest of his life, Faulkner

took on added family responsibilities. When Estelle was "physically or mentally fragile" (she had suicidal tendencies), Faulkner attentively cared for her along with the three children. At his father's death, in 1932, he assumed the patriarchal role, providing for his mother, Maud, his brother, Dean, and various other relatives. When Dean was killed in an airplane crash in 1935, Faulkner added to his financial burdens, supporting Dean's wife and soon–to–be–born child. At one point, he supported at least "a dozen white dependents...and close to that number of black ones" (Blotner: 449).

What was Faulkner doing during this period? From 1930 to 1935, he produced the following books: **As I Lay Dying** (1930), **Sanctuary** (1931), **These 13** (1931), **Light in August** (1932), **The Green Bough** (1933), and **Dr. Martini and Other Stories** (1934). His short stories included: "Red Leaves," "Lizards in Jamshyd's Courtyard," "A Mountain Victory," and "The Peasants." He wrote movie scripts or dialogue for: **Today We Live**, **War Birds**, and **The Story of Temple Drake** (**Sanctuary**).

Perhaps because of the stress related to having to produce, or because of his financial or emotional responsibilities, or because he just liked the taste of liquor, Faulkner was a heavy drinker and periodically was placed in local sanitariums (Byhalia) to "dry out." Although drinking did not interfere with his writing most of the time, his "alcoholic" behavior offended many. Whereas in Oxford, those who cared for Faulkner considered this habit to be merely a family trait and were not too concerned when he behaved badly, Hollywood movie producers, under tight schedules, tried to restrict his alcohol intake.

As part of this effort, Howard Hawks (with whom Faulkner was working), introduced the author to his secretary, Meta Carpenter, a 28–year–old divorcee from Mississippi. As usual when Faulkner was in Hollywood, he suffered from "loneliness and homesickness," and Meta provided him not only with love but with the Southern link he missed. The year was 1935, and Faulkner was the ardent lover, happy for the first time in years. He presented Meta with poems and sketches and even inscribed the galleys and first copy of **Absalom, Absalom** to her. For the next fifteen years, through her marriage and subsequent divorce, this relationship continued.

Estelle was aware of Meta's existence, and although she and

Faulkner had not shared a bed since Jill's birth, they lived together amicably on the basis of love of family and their common Mississippi ties. She would frequently visit Faulkner in California where they resided in a house just north of Santa Monica. Her life there was pleasant; she enjoyed the Southern California social scene, partying in Beverly Hills and sharing friendships with movie producers and stars.

Through film writing, Faulkner earned a great deal of money. From January to August, 1937, he earned $21,650 from Twentieth Century–Fox. In early 1938, he sold **The Unvanquished** to MGM for $25,000, and the continuing sales of his books, articles, and verse brought him more capital. During this period, he published: **Pylon** (1935), **Absalom, Absalom** (1936), "The Brooch," "Fool About a Horse," and "Afternoon of a Cow." He contributed to the following movies: **The College Widow, The Road to Glory, Banjo on my Knee, Gunga Din, The Last Slaver,** and **Drums Along the Mohawk.**

Financially secure, at least temporarily, Faulkner plowed these earnings into a 320 acre farm, seventeen miles northeast of Oxford in Lafayette County. Here, at Greenfield Farm, he would close the decade, farming with his brother, Johncy, and raising mules. Content in this setting, Faulkner, according to Johncy, "'found the people he wrote about, hill people. They made their own whiskey from their own corn and ... fought over elections and settled their own disputes'" (Blotner: 393).

Faulkner ended the thirties as he had begun them—with critical bouquets and brickbats. In January 1939, he appeared on the cover of **Time** magazine, and Robert Cantwell, author of the cover story, placed Faulkner "in the forefront of the Southern literary renaissance" (Blotner: 406). Cantwell lauded Faulkner's latest effort, **The Wild Palms** (1939), noting particularly that the portion about the tall convict was "a pulsing, racing story, a kind of hysterical Huckleberry Finn, its humor at once grotesque and shrewd, its moral at once grim and humane" (Blotner: 406). In contrast, Alfred Kazin, in a review of **The Wild Palms**, referred to "the novel's prose ... [as] a kind of tortured poetry"; Clifton Fadiman and Malcolm Cowley could find nothing favorable to say about the book. In the eye of this critical hurricane, Faulkner, as usual, was hammering away at

new stories to provide the income he so desperately needed. Thus, he ended the thirties. ‡

Eileen Klink

‡ What Faulkner produced at his desk from 1940 until his death in 1962 included: **The Hamlet, Go Down Moses, Intruder in the Dust, Knight's Gambit, Collected Stories of William Faulkner, Notes ona Horsethief, Requiem for a Nun, Land of Pharaohs** (movie for Howard Hawks), **A Fable** (Pulitzer Prize), **Big Woods, The Town, The Mansion, The Reivers.**

The Thirties: A Reconsideration in the Light of the American Political Tradition. Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press, 1968. 154 pp.

The Thirties contains eight essays delivered in lecture form during the annual seminar on the American Political Tradition held at Claremont College during February 1966. Among the eight lecturers were Irving Kristol, co–editor of **The Public Interest**; Howard Zinn, Professor of Government at Boston University; Leslie A. Fiedler, prominent American literary critic and author; Frank H. Knight, Professor of Social Sciences and Philosophy at the University of Chicago; Upton Sinclair, internationally known novelist among whose works are **The Jungle** and **King Coal**; and two former government officials who participated in shaping the New Deal under Roosevelt; Raymond Moley and Rexford G. Tugwell.

These speakers were carefully chosen so that different viewpoints, from many different fields, would promote greater understanding of that troubled era, the Great Depression. Topics concerned the literary and artistic movements which began and have since sprung from that time, the staggering economical impact upon the vast numbers of unemployed people, and the political theories and philosophies surrounding the 1930's. The speakers selected were all survivors of the thirties and therefore offered valuable insights into the actual issues of the day, not simply what is cited in historical texts covering the period or what has become popular myth. Essays such as Knight's "The Economic Principle of the New Deal" and Moley and Tugwell's "Symposium: Early Days of the New Deal" bring to life the economic and political atmosphere of the era.

Beyond such strictly utilitarian value, however, one of the text's greatest strengths is that the speeches it records were delivered in a period very similar to the 1930's, i.e., the volatile 1960's. Comparison between the radicalism of the 1960's and the Leftist movement of the 1930's is thus inevitable. In his essay "A Comparison of the Militant Left of the Thirties and Sixties," Howard Zinn examines the two lefts, old and new. He seems to favor the new, a preference shared by Leslie Fiedler in "The Two Memories: Reflections on Writers and Writing in the Thirties." In a speech delivered in 1966, in a period of intense upheaval, Fiedler has the prophetic insight to predict that the youth of the 1960s would eventually "have

it out and then settle down with their degrees and their jobs into becoming precisely the image of their fathers, more like their fathers than it's comfortable for any young person ever to acknowledge that he really has any change of feeling." Fiedler seems a bit skeptical regarding both movements, old as well as new, asserting that the effects of the New Deal were not entirely salutary.

The eight essays in this text offer an interesting mixture of factual and philosophical accounts on the various movements during the 1930's. Although some material should be considered introductory, this is due in part to the nature of the symposium, which was intended to provide undergraduates with a basis for scholarly work. Overall, the text provides a stimulating mix of topics and sub–topics dealing with the Great Depression.

Laura Skandera

The Hollow Men. By Michael Gold. New York: International Publishers, 1941.

Michael Gold originally wrote a series of articles for the **Daily Worker** under the title "The Great Tradition: Can Literary Renegades Destroy It?" In 1941 these articles were put together and published as a book, under the title **The Hollow Men.** As with the articles, the book poses the following question: Can literary renegades destroy the great democratic tradition of American life and literature? Gold's answer is a clear "no," but his answer, nevertheless, dramatizes the obstacles faces by the democratic forces, especially during the 1920s and 30s. During the 1920s, argues Gold, the democratic forces were inhibited by the post–war economic boom. As in Europe, where Nazi–fascism was on the rise, in the U.S. the forces of monopoly capitalism "killed off the spirit of labor; it destroyed the march of a socialist movement that had registered in one election almost a million votes" (Gold: 21). The American Wasteland of the 20s produced both a leisure class divorced from the people's aspirations and, as a consequence, supporters of Fascism (Pound, Eliot and others), and also the so–called "Lost Generation"—liberal expatriates who tried to drown the sterility of the decade in Parisian cafés. Both groups separated themselves from the day–to–day struggles and quests of the American proletariat.

The 1929 stock–market crash brought the light which revealed the dramatic crisis of the capitalist system even to liberal intellectuals. Capitalism was in shambles and the opportunity to organize workers and intellectuals was there. And so it happened. Besides the misery to "20 million disinherited Americans," the economic crisis brought "the first mass demonstrations for unemployment insurance" (Gold: 33), a national congress of writers in 1935, a national congress of dancers, musicians and artists who got involved in a nationwide investigation of labor conditions, the creation of The Federal Arts Projects, and finally, a new democratic cultural renaissance.

The Great Depression is, then, not seen by Gold as simply a period of bourgeois crisis—it was also a period of proletarian organization—an experience which enormously strengthened the workers' bargaining powers. Because of Gold's constant reference to the degree of organization achieved by the lower classes, and be-

cause of the unprecedented intellectual empathy with the workers' difficulties, the reader of **Hollow Men** sees the period with a certain nostalgia—not a nostalgia for the crisis, but a sense of regret for having "lost" all that organization and faith. The forces of monopoly capitalism, which with fascist-like strategies led America into the Second World War, temporarily unified a divided country, but ended the dreams of millions of workers and intellectuals.

But the intellectuals—those who deserted the communist ideals and the Party, and also those who helped to promote America's involvement in the war—are the target of Gold's harshest criticism. In fact, the book presents interesting analyses of the reasons (Gold calls them "alibis") which intellectuals presented to break with the Communist Party. Especially interesting are the sometimes lengthy discussions of writers like Sherwood Anderson, Hemingway, Dos Passos, Lewis Mumford, Gertrude Stein, William Saroyan and Robert Sherwood. All of them became what Gold calls hollow men—men who lost the hope in a better future for society and the love for humanity.

The Hollow Men is a book for those who wish to look at the 30s from a Marxist perspective. Looking through Gold's eyes, many of our idols change color and some are literally destroyed. Despite its iconoclastic nature, however, Gold manages to make his perspective as real as any other, and enriching.

Dilvo I. Ristoff

The American Dream in the Great Depression. By Charles R. Hearn. Connecticut and London: Greenwood Press, 1977.

Mr. Hearn examines 1) inspirational articles on success; 2) magazine biographies and other articles relating to the myth of success; 3) popular magazine (formula) fiction; and 4) the "serious" fiction of the 1920s and 30s to determine the ways in which the depression changed the American myth of the self-made man's social mobility as portrayed in literature.

The inspirational success articles in the 1920s presented America as a prosperous utopia with unfettered economic growth within everyone's reach. Many articles of this type continued to be published during the depression, but articles on the cult of personality (as opposed to character) and success in non-commercial areas became more numerous. The new genre of how-to-succeed guidebooks provided evidence of a new "outer-directed" personality rather than the inner-directedness of the powerful business magnate.

Magazine biographies before the crash typically dealt with self-made men as their subject, almost invariably captains of industry, who overcame poverty-stricken childhoods to succeed in business through their individual perseverance and thrift. Hearn found that the biographies of the 1930s dealt with subjects from other areas of human achievement, notably scientists, sports heroes and political figures. The few businessmen who were profiled during the period achieved prominence in established corporations rather than by founding their own industries.

Popular magazine fiction in the 1920s often fell into a success story pattern. A poverty-stricken boy would achieve success and win his "golden girl" through his own efforts, often beating out a more advantaged rival. Similar "formula" stories appeared throughout the 1930s, in which a commitment to business values often provided the solution to economic problems. Hearn attributes the popularity of such stories to escapism.

The best part of Hearn's book is his discussion of serious literature. He stresses that the serious writers of the twenties saw through the shallowness inherent in the middle-class materialism of the dream, recognizing it as inaccessible (Dreiser, **An American Tragedy**, compromising (Fitzgerald, **The Great Gatsby**) or de-

humanizing (Lewis, **Babbit**).

The serious writers of the depression reacted to the hardships of the era. Several studied the importance of dreams and myths in making life bearable (Steinbeck, **Of Mice and Men** and O'Neil, "The Iceman Cometh"). Others stressed the destructive consequences of pursuing the dream (Farrell, **Studs Lonigan**). Studies of the underdog's plight glorified the average man (McCabe, "A Chance to be Somebody") or presented his heroic struggles under adverse circumstances (Steinbeck, **Grapes of Wrath**). The criminal or "hard-boiled" character (Hemingway,**To Have and Have Not**) took rugged individualism to its logical conclusion.

This book chronicles the changes which occurred in the purveyors of the American dream but does not give the reader a sense of the destitution of the 1930s. The real threat to the American dream was its obvious falsity to everyone struggling to survive.

Randall Huff

Literature at the Barricades: The American Writer in the 1930s. Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1982.

This book of thirteen essays by writers and college professors grew out of a 1978 symposium on "The American Writer in the 1930s." While demonstrating the diversity of the Left, it provides insights into the major controversies and some of the artists and some of the minor artists of the era.

The first of the book's three parts provides a retrospective examination of the pressures placed on the writers at the time. Josephine Herbst chronicles her adventures as a leftist, concluding that the life she led then was no less compromised than her life as a propagandist during the second world war. Largely anecdotal, her essay includes vignettes implicitly contrasting the communists' need for simplified "workers' literature" with the over–simplified, sexually based ("Your wife's at home, soldier") anti–German propaganda she was supposed to help propagate.

Townsend Ludington studied the breakdown of the friendship between the party–line Communist Lawson and the increasingly disillusioned–with–the–Left Dos Passos. Each man tried to keep politics out of his letters, but ultimately could not ignore the other's publications, which he believed harmful to his own political causes. The essay records Dos Passos' increasing belief in western–style democracy.

The second part of the book studies the impact of the depression on the careers of a variety of writers. John Steinbeck, Sylvia Clark argues, was fortunate that his isolation in northern California let him develop his art without justifying it in political terms. Donald Pizer argues that dismissal of James T. Farrell's work as typically proletarian, naturalistic, Marxist, sociological and documentary, and therefore wholly a product of the 1930s, disregards the impact of the 1920s on the formation of Farrell's skills.

Jack B. Moore argues for Richard Wright's inclusion as a southern writer, considering Wright's visions of brutal racial suppression as valid as other treatments of the American south.

Glenda Hobbs studies Harriette Arnow's development into a talented woman artist in spite of the compromises forced on her by profit–minded publishers and agents. Arnow was forced to add the blood feud to **Mountain Path**, for example, and the novel was

disregarded as another "Kentucky novel."

The third part of the book examines criticism in the 1930s. Daniel Aaron praises Edmund Wilson's open-mindedness and liberality. Alan Ward comments on the **Partisan Review**.

The book ends with William T. Farrell's 1939 farewell to the 1930s, which provides an overview of the decade's major trends and literary figures. The debate over literature's role in raising class consciousness has been settled by the end of the decade. Those books "written according to the pattern of the left sectarians...were hailed in their day, largely unread, and are now forgotten." So much for Socialist Realism.

Randall Huff

Nathanael West: The Art of His Life. By Jay Martin. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux 1970. 435 pp.

"Only a many who had been hurt deeply could write so comically."

In 1930, Nathanael West was 26 years old and had just finished his first novel, **The Dream Life of Balso Snell**. He worked as night manager at the Kenmore Hall Hotel, a glorified rooming house in Manhattan, which was partially owned by his uncle. Later that year he was hired as manager of the Sutton Hotel, which gave him the opportunity to observe the life of the masses, with whom he had a great propensity to identify. In a sense, these hotels became West's laboratory, his imaginative Paris. They evoked a vivid personal response in him and were a fertile source of fantasy. In the thirties when, like West, a great number of Americans escaped the horrors of the depression through fantasy, the author dealt in fiction with mass life on the deepest possible and most relevant level by concentrating on the fantasies of the masses.

Before 1930 was over, West had written 15,000 words of **Miss Lonelyhearts** which he sent to Clifton Fadiman of Simon and Schuster. Fadiman turned the manuscript down. West's brother–in–law, S. J. Perelman, thought these original chapters too psychological, and felt they should be more concrete.

In the autumn of 1930, **Balso Snell** was accepted for publication for Contact Press by W. C. Williams. It is considered a lyric novel made out of West's "violent American response" to European materials. West felt it was "a very professional book."

As for West's romantic life at this time, though he was "reserved" with most women, and very "chivalric," he had contracted gonorrhea before college (Brown) and again during college. (He earned a Ph. D. from Brown in 1924) This was one reason why he always associated sex with pain. In the autumn of 1929 he had met in New York, and fallen in love with Beatrice Matthieu, a Paris fashion writer for **The New Yorker**. He promised to visit her in Paris that year—perhaps marry her—but uncertain about his future as a novelist if he did marry, he kept putting the trip off. Finally, he gave Beatrice up altogether and started dating Alice Shepard, a fashion model. Pep (West's nickname) was very attracted to her because of her elegance and sense of style. They were informally

engaged until the winter of 1932–33 when Alice broke off the affair because Pep slept with another woman. West considered his betrayal of Alice the great disgrace of his life.

In the summer of 1931 West took a three–month leave from his hotel job and rented a cabin in the Adirondacks with his friend Julian Shapiro. He planned to finish **Miss Lonelyhearts** during this time, but even though he worked diligently (a two–hour workday was diligent), it would still take him another year–and–a–half to finish it. This summer vacation marks one of the episodes in West's lifelong love affair with nature and with hunting. Another took place in the spring of 1933, when the Perelmans and he bought Mike Gold's 83–acre farm in Erwinna, Pennsylvania for $6,000, $500 down.

West's recognition as an artist continued to rise in 1931–32, when W. C. Williams asked him to co–edit the revived literary magazine **Contact: An American Quarterly**, an avant garde publication with the stated purpose of cutting "a trail through the American jungle without the use of a European compass." Unfortunately, **Contact** was aborted after three issues.

Williams had high praise for the still–not–completed **Miss Lonelyhearts**, chapters of which were printed in **Contact** and **Contempo**. He felt that West explored spiritual disease so carefully and so well that he labeled it "West's disease." West knew that poverty was indeed spiritual and that its effects were devastating. He saw it on the sidewalks of New York, saw it in those who roomed at the Sutton. He felt he had a personal relation to the sufferers, a feeling of sympathy and of guilt.

West was determined to finish **Miss Lonelyhearts**—and did —in the autumn and winter of 1932 when he went to visit Josephine Herbst and John Hermann at their country home in Erwinna. On April 18, Liveright published 2200 copies of the book (to be sold at $2 each). It received excellent reviews, but almost simultaneous to publication Arthur Pell, the publisher, declared a bogus bankruptcy, and 2000 copies were seized by Liveright's creditors. Thus, while demand for the book ran high, there were none to sell. By the time the copies were finally released two months later (after rights had been transferred to Harcourt Brace), the long delay had already ruined West's chances of real commercial success. However, the novel was critically acclaimed, so much so that the editors of **Contempo** mag-

azine dedicated an entire issue to a study of **Miss Lonelyhearts**.

In the spring of 1933, Darryl F. Zanuck of Twentieth Century Fox bought the screenplay rights to the novel for $4,000. West also got his first film assignment out of the book. He was hired by Samuel Goldwin to write, in New York, an original screenplay to launch the Russian actress Anna Stern. This assignment was eventually terminated by the studio.

In July, 1933, Perelman's aid, West was hired by Columbia Pictures to come to Hollywood as a Junior Writer. His first assignment was on a studio-owned property titled **Beauty Parlor**. Not used to the Hollywood way—slow as a creeper vine—he wrote a first draft original screenplay in just two weeks.

On August 26, after writing three drafts of an original screenplay called **Return to the Soil**, West's week-to-week contract was terminated. However, fascinated with the grotesque curiosities of Hollywood, he stayed in California a few more weeks. During the first tour on duty in Tinsel Town, he wrote a short, satirical story, "Business Deal," which was published in the "Hollywood" issue of the New York-based satirical magazine **Americana**. Ironically, on December 13, 1933, **Advice to the Lovelorn** wasproduced, a movie supposedly based on **Miss Lonelyhearts**, but which bore absolutely no resemblance to West's novel.

Back in Erwinna for the autumn and winter of 1933, Pep started his third novel, **A Cool Million**, in which he intended to dramatize the theme that the American dream was a monstrous nightmare. He felt he could accomplish this by gathering together the cliches of success literature into an ironic, comic plot. In December 1933, he sent half of **A Cool Million** to Harcourt. The novel was rejected at this house, but it was later published (in June 1934) by Covici-Friede. Movie rights to this unproducible novel (it violated the Hays morality code) were bought by Columbia Pictures. The reviews of this book were much less enthusiastic than for **Miss Lonelyhearts** and, according to critics, it is an inferior performance. It did not sell well. All told, from his first three novels, West made a total of $780 in royalties.

It was at this time that West turned his attention—briefly-to writing a stage revue using American folk and art materials (an "American Chauve Souris" he called it). And in the summer of 1934,

he collaborated with Perelman on the comedy play **Even Stephen,** a satire of publishing and publicity practices, and sensational novels of sexual exposure, among other things. Neither of these plays was ever produced. In September 1934, his fortune looking very bleak, West applied for a Guggenheim Fellowship. Though he received excellent commendations from F. Scott Fitzgerald and others his application was rejected.

The darkness of this period was deepened when an unnamed, married Erwinna neighbor attempted suicide because West broke off their affair by moving to the Brevoort Hotel in New York City. And it deepened further when he, along with several other writers, spent the night in jail for illegally picketing an Ohrbachs and a Klein's department store to help publicize a strike by store employees. This episode is noteworthy for two reasons: West's downcast, even morbid response to his jailing revealed how distressing he found this experience and the depths of the depression he was in. Second, it was one of the few overt political actions West ever got involved in.

Still, there were others later on. For example, in November 1936, he attended the Western Writer's Congress, where he delivered a paper on the "*Makers of Mass Neuroses*" and participated in a roundtable discussion. He was active in the Screen Writers of America Guild, and in 1939 he became studio chairman of the union at Universal. Later, he was named to the union's Executive Board. Friends also recall that he collected money from other writers at Republic for the Spanish Refugee Relief campaign and that he worked for the Hollywood Anti–Nazi League. During the last months of his life, at the request of his bride Eileen, he flirted one more with the Party, but West, "a born questioner," was bored with its rhetoric. First and foremost he wanted to be a novelist, not a politico. But unlike other left–wing writers, he did political work with the purpose of fueling his novel, not as a guilty escape for making money as a Hollywood writer.

The fact that West's literary work dealt with the mass mind, American myths did affect his career however. Mostly, it made it difficult for him to place his stories in leftist literary magazines. One editor commented, "[West] was interested in the Party throughout the decade, but his consuming interest was people not programs." Those who knew West remarked that he possessed "feeling for human

tragedy" that transcended political ideologies. West himself believed that "morality was hot, art was icy."

In March 1935, West returned to Hollywood from New York seeking a writing job. During the summer and autumn, unemployed, he lived at the Pa–Va–Sed Hotel in Hollywood. This continued the dark period which began in New York. His lack of prospects was compounded by disease: he contracted gonorrhea and later became very ill with a swollen prostate. The positive side was that he had ample time to daydream, to range over the tales in his mind (as Faye Greener does in **Day of the Locust**), and to start writing his fourth novel.

It was during this period that West got to know Hollywood's sordid underworld well, and that he became familiar with the dreaming, out–of–work cowboys, hustlers, gamblers and crooks that people **Day of the Locust**. A friend of his once remarked that he "was a keen observer, always looking for bizarre backgrounds, and always attempting to improve his knowledge of the human race." Besides being interested in the seamy side of life, West was a "great people watcher, with the proclivity to identify with mass men." West was also a frequent visitor to Stanley Rose's bookstore on Hollywood Boulevard, where famous writers (e. g. Hammet, Fitzgerald, Schulberg and Faulkner, with whom West hunted) congregated in the back room, and where West was respected. Then again, West was respected by everyone and universally well liked.

The main reason West could not get a major studio writing job at this time was because he was in the screenwriter's union, which the studios were trying to crush. Finally, on January 17, 1936, West was hired by Republic Films for $200 a week, a steady job that lasted until, seeking greener pastures at other studios, he terminated it at the end of January 1938. Some of the worked on during this time included **The President's Mystery, It Could Happen to You, Ladies in Distress** and other assorted C and B picture efforts. Later in 1938, he was hired by RKO for $350 a week and wrote **Five Came Back**. About this time, he collaborated on and sold the original treatment of **Heritage of the Wild** to MGM for $7,500.

West had no trouble separating his screenwriting efforts from his novel writing. A young contemporary of his said that movies "had

nothing at all to do with **him** [West], his interior life. " Screenplays were not literature; they were skeletons for visual works. Writing them allowed West to indulge his own deep personal attachment to fantasy. He worked quickly and enjoyed the work, indifferent to the artlessness of his films. Still, he was no hack. Another colleague of West's remarked, "He affected fellow writers as Bogart did actors, with his reserve and rock-like integrity." On the other hand, he wrote his novels with painstaking care, polishing and debating every word.

Between 1937 and 1938. while still in Hollywood, West collaborated with the playwright Joseph Schrank on an anti-war comedy play originally titled **Gentleman, the War**. After innumerable difficulties which set back Broadway opening, the play opened on Broadway in November 1938 as **Good Hunting**. West's literary career—indeed his whole life—was marked by bad timing, but his luck with this play was the worst. Hitler had recently dismembered Czechoslovakia with Western consent; atrocities against German Jews were coming to light; and American sentiment was decidedly pro-war. **Good Hunting** was greeted with icy reviews and closed after two performances.

On May 17, 1938, Bennet Cerf of Random House had accepted **Day of the Locust** for publication (at that time titled **The Cheated**). Satisfied with his $500 advance and with royalties of 10% on the first 2500 books, 12 1/2% on the next 2500, and 15% on the rest, West set about finishing the book in the East.

On December 19, 1938, broke, but with **Day of the Locust** finally completed, West returned to Hollywood where he landed a writing job at Universal, which he described to friends as a "friendly lot." There he worked on the pictures **Spirit of Culver** and **I Stole a Million**. The latter, a "decisive box-office success," was his first important solo screen credit. His treatment drew praise from the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors Association (MPAA) as "by far the best piece of craftsmanship in screen adaptation, certainly, in a year." With Boris Ingster (Sergei Eisenstein's assistant director on **Thunder Over Mexico**) he wrote **Before the Fact** for RKO (a script that was later taken over, and altered only slightly, by Alfred Hitchcock into **Suspicion**, starring Cary Grant). West's fortunes were on the rise, at least as a screenwriter. As for **Day**

of the Locust, it was a financial failure for Random House: only 1964 of a 3000–copy press run had sold by February 1940. West was disappointed. Four novels and a decade of work had brought him only $1,280, and on April 27, 1940, he was only able to get a paltry $250 advance from Random House for his fifth novel, which he was destined never to complete. But money was only a means to an end for West. As one friend noted: "He was joyful in success—and as immune to success as he was to failure." In 1939, he formulated a plan which called for him to write screenplays for two years, then take a year off to complete his novel.

In 1940, there was an unpredictable rise in the fortunes of West's love life as well. Pep had had several brief affairs in Hollywood, but he had never really got close to women because he was afraid that they would make demands which would interfere with his work. All this changed on April 19, 1940 when he was "strangely, and gloriously married" to 29 year–old Eileen McKenney, a divorced woman with a two year–old son. Eileen had been the subject of her sister Ruth's novel **All About Eileen**, which portrayed her as a sunny ingenue. But in reality, Eileen was "absolutely" lonely and felt doomed, a young woman who shrewdly attempted to mask her insecurities by image making. According to friends, she was possessed of great compassion and concern, a tenderness for others' egos, and sexual know–how," all the things West needed in a woman. She broke down his social reserve as well, and their marriage—though it ended tragically, eight months later—was "extraordinarily happy...with no frictions or disillusionments." Pep beamed as he saw Eileen blossom.

On summer vacation in Oregon that year, West started work on his fifth novel, but he was hesitant to get too far into it because he knew he did not have time for a complete draft. Besides, he was absorbed in his marriage and in his hunting.

Back home in North Hollywood, he wrote (with Ingster) a treatment for a screen adaptation of **A Cool Million** which they sold to Columbia for $10,000. (The treatment was unfilmable because it violated the Hays Code.) They also sold a 26–page treatment, **Bird in Hand**, ("a real turkey" to RKO for $25,000, and were working on a film for Columbia, **Amateur Angel**, for $600 a week when West died.

Pep was a notoriously bad, a "murderous" driver. In 1937,

while returning from a hunt in Los Banos, California with his Republic Studios producer, West nearly drove his car off a plank bridge, and the two just barely escaped death. Eileen used often to tell a story about Pep being stopped by the police for doing something ridiculous while driving. The punchline was that the cop felt Pep was a "nice guy, bad driver." On December 22, 1940, while racing home after a good hunting trip to the Eastern Baja, West ran a stop sign near El Centro, California, and crashed into an oncoming car. Nathanael (36) and Eileen (30) died within hours.

Joe Ryan