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## What the Revolutionary Movement Can Do for a Writer

BY MALCOLM COWLEY

IT IS important first of all to define what the revolutionary movement cannot do for a writer, so that nobody will hope for miracles that will not be performed. It cannot give him personal salvation. It is not a church that calls upon him to have faith, to surrender his doubts, to lay down his burden of anxieties, and from henceforth to follow a sure path mapped out for him by sanctified leaders. This is an age when Messiahs are being invoked not only by unemployed preachers and engineers and by shopkeepers who have lost their shops, but also by bewildered novelists and by poets no longer able to write poetry. Marx and Lenin were not Messiahs; they were scientists of action. Their aim was not to convert but to convince.

Again, the revolutionary movement cannot transform writers, men used to walking by themselves and puzzling over personal difficulties, into political leaders of the working class. The working class will furnish its own leaders. And yet again, the revolutionary movement cannot change third-rate bourgeois novelists into great proletarian novelists. It may not be able to transform bourgeois novelists into any sort of proletarian novelists at all.

At this point I am not using the term "proletarian novel" in the very wide sense that Edwin Seaver tried to give it yesterday. I am defining it in a much narrower sense as a novel written from the revolutionary point of view about working-class characters. There is a great need for such novels to-day, but there is also a considerable doubt as to whether many of them will be written by men who began their career as middle-class novelists. Of course, such men might succeed after a period of years, by living among workers and actively taking part in their struggles and learning to see the world from their point of view. They might also succeed by going around with a notebook, like Emile Zola, and approaching their material from the outside. But Zola's type of objectivity is not wholly satisfying to most contemporary novelists, who demand more "inwardness," a deeper knowledge of the characters one is describing. That

sort of "inwardness" cannot be acquired in a few months or a few years, since it depends on a long, slow process of acquiring sympathies and associations.

Of course there are examples of great fiction written about the members of one class by a man or woman who belonged to another class. Elizabeth Madox Roberts' fine novel, *The Time of Man*, belongs to this category; it is a book about a tenant farmer's wife written by a woman of the land-owning class. Tolstoy, the nobleman, finally succeeded in identifying himself completely with the Russian peasants. But Joshua Kunitz tells me that Tolstoy once tried to write a novel about a Jew and abandoned the project. His plan was good, his ideas were sympathetic, but he found that he could not feel his way inside the character. It seems to me that some recent books about the proletariat or the lumpenproletariat would never have been written if their authors had been as thoroughly conscientious as Tolstoy. Two examples are a novel by Catherine Brody, *Nobody Starves*, which had hidden in it a vague sort of condescension and which made the lives of workers seem duller, more hopeless and apathetic than they are in reality; and Sherwood Anderson's so-called Communist novel of three years ago, *Beyond Desire*, which sentimentalized and priapified them, made them smell of sex.

Good novels about the working class are needed at present more than any other type of literature. But this does not mean that those who can write good middle-class revolutionary novels should feel it a duty to write bad working-class novels. They can serve in other ways.

I have devoted perhaps too much of my brief time to these negative aspects of the revolutionary movement. But it is important to arouse no hopes that cannot be fulfilled. The writers who join the revolutionary movement in the expectation of being saved or being endowed with leadership or being reborn to genius are likely to leave it suddenly—as Sherwood Anderson did after the failure of his novel. Others, who come with more reasonable hopes, are likely to remain. For the fact is that the revolutionary movement can and will do more for writers than writers can do for the revolutionary movement. The fact is that it can offer them practical inducements—not financial inducements, certainly, for it will never make them rich; but still inducements that are worth a great deal more to them than money.

In the first place it offers them an audience—the most eager and

alive and responsive audience that now exists. We saw part of this audience the other night in Mecca Temple, when for one evening our discussions were carried out of the atmosphere of the study and the back-bar-room into a bigger world. We heard about this audience from the delegates speaking for the Marine Workers and the American League Against War and Fascism. We might hear still more about it from Alexander Trachtenberg, who can tell us how pamphlets issued by International Publishers Company are printed in editions of fifty and a hundred thousand and exhausted almost on the day of publication. But the most impressive testimonial to the quality of the revolutionary audience was given a few weeks ago by Archibald MacLeish.

Now MacLeish is scarcely a revolutionary writer. Mike Gold once described him as having "the fascist unconscious." I believed at the time that the charge was at least premature, but later it seemed to be justified by other poems and articles that MacLeish was writing. All of us were amazed to hear that he had arranged for a special performance of his play *Panic*, to be given for the benefit of *The New Theater* and *The New Masses*. After the performance, he partly explained his motives by thanking the audience for its attention, for its applause, for its criticism, for its general lively interest. The whole point was that this poet who had won the Pulitzer Prize, this editor and writer for *Fortune*, had to turn to a revolutionary audience to get that sort of response without which any writer has the feeling of living in a vacuum and writing with invisible ink.

In the second place, the revolutionary movement gives writers a whole new range of subject matter. It seems to me that during the half-century ending in 1930, there was an increasing tendency for serious novelists and dramatists to occupy themselves with a single theme: the conflict between the individual and society, between the Artist and the World. This theme has been treated in hundreds, in thousands of bad novels and in a few good novels that almost all of us have read. James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* is perhaps the best of them all—but there are also *The Way of All Flesh*, *New Grub Street*, *Of Human Bondage*, *The Hill of Dreams*, *Manhattan Transfer*, *Look Homeward Angel*, *Of Time and the River*.

A few characteristics are shared in common by all the novels of this type. One is that the hero usually is presented as a great figure typical of all mankind—"a legend of man's hunger in his youth"—

whereas in reality he is typical of nothing except the over-educated and under-adjusted young man of the lower middle classes, who finds that the dream-world of books is to be preferred to the drab world he actually encounters. Another characteristic is that although these novels portray a conflict between the individual and society, all the emphasis, all the loving sympathy, is placed on the individual. Society, the outer world, becomes progressively dimmer and more puzzling in the artist's eyes. There is an attempt to escape from it into an inner world, into the subconscious, until finally these artist-and-the-world novels are transformed into interior monologues.

Now, the interior monologue was at first saluted and celebrated as a great new device for enriching the texture of fiction. In reality, it had the opposite effect. After several years we began to see that the inner world it was supposed to illuminate was really not very interesting, not very fresh. The inner world of one middle-class novelist was very much like the inner world of another middle-class novelist. And the liberating effect of the revolutionary movement has been to carry the interest of novelists outside themselves, into the violent contrasts and struggles of the real world.

In the third place, the revolutionary movement gives the artist a perspective on himself—an idea that his own experiences are not something accidental and unique, but are part of a vast pattern. The revolutionary movement teaches him that art is not an individual but a social product—that it arises from experiences in society, and that, if these experiences cease and if the artist no longer participates in the life about him, the whole source of his inspiration runs dry, evaporates like a shallow pool after the rain.

In the fourth place, the revolutionary movement allies the interests of writers with those of a class that is rising, instead of with the interests of a confused and futile and decaying class. It gives them a new source of strength.

I have said that the revolutionary movement can perform no miracles, and yet with writers, especially with poets, it does sometimes produce effects that appear miraculous. Take William Wordsworth, for example. During three or four years of his long career, he wrote great poems; during the rest of it he settled down to be the most skillful, high-minded and accomplished bore in English literature. Critics and college students have always been puzzled by this phenomenon. It is only during the past few years that some light has been thrown on it—that we have learned how he visited France at the height of the French Revolution, how he was filled

with revolutionary enthusiasm, how he learned to think in universal terms—and then how he became disillusioned, turned his eyes inward, accepted the eternal rightness and triteness of British society, and spent his last fifty years bumbling in a garden.

We might well be skeptical about the source of Wordsworth's strength, if it were not that we could find the same pattern in the lives of other poets. William Blake called himself a Jacobin, he paraded the streets of London in a liberty cap, he wrote great poems—then he too became disillusioned, he decided that the first revolution must be "in the soul of man," and he wrote those Prophetic Books that nobody reads to-day precisely because they are not worth reading. Even Baudelaire had an experience something like this. In 1848, the revolutionary year in France, he fought for the revolutionists. He fought for them both in February, when the middle classes and the working classes rose together, and again in June, when only the workers manned the barricades. He wrote at least one proletarian poem correct enough in its ideology to be printed in *Pravda* or *Humanité* if it had been written in 1935. He wrote many other poems at this period and immediately afterwards; it was the most productive time of his life. But the working class was defeated and Baudelaire lost his interest and his energy.

Heinrich Heine, Algernon Swinburne—the pattern could be traced through many other lives, and this is a task that I specially recommend to revolutionary critics. But the most striking example of all is Arthur Rimbaud. During four years of his life, from the age of fifteen till the age of nineteen, he wrote poems that are certainly among the masterpieces of French literature; then, for the rest of his life, he wrote nothing whatever. This miracle—this genuine miracle—has always dazzled critics. So far as I know, not one of them has pointed out the obvious connection with the struggles of the French working classes. Rimbaud began to write during the Franco-Prussian War, when Napoleon III was overthrown. At the age of fifteen, he was drawing up the constitution for an ideal Communist state. During the Paris Commune, he was in the country, at a distance from the fighting, but he was doing his best to help—he was winning over soldiers in country inns and he was trying to make his way into Paris through the lines of the besiegers. The fierce energy he displayed during the next few years was not his energy alone; it was that of the revolutionary French working classes. But the Commune was overthrown and the reservoir of energy was not refilled. Rimbaud turned away from litera-

ture altogether and devoted himself to adventure, exploration, the smuggling of rifles into Abyssinia. His life became a parable of what happens under fascism.

Perhaps I am spending too much time on these examples chosen from the literatures of other countries. But I want to make it clear that our discussions here in this room, tedious as they may sometimes seem, have a direct relation with what has happened and what is about to happen in the great world of human affairs. And that sense of relationship is, I believe, the final and the principal gift that the revolutionary movement can make to writers. It gives them the sense of human life, not as a medley of accidents, but as a connected and continuing process. It ties things together, allowing novelists to see the connection between things that are happening to-day in our own neighborhoods, at the gates of factories, in backyards and street-corners, with the German counter-revolution, with the fight for collectivization in Russia, with the civil war now being waged in the interior of China; and it connects all these events with the struggles of the past. It gives the values, the unified interpretation, without which one can write neither good history nor good tragedy.

During the past year as a reader and literary critic, I have had several opportunities to compare books written from a revolutionary point of view with books written from a liberal point of view, when both authors were treating the same subject. In almost every case, the revolutionary books were better, not merely as politics but as literature.

To give one example, both Pearl S. Buck and André Malraux have written novels about life in Shanghai at the time when the proletarian leaders were being executed. The novels by both writers contain an episode in which the hero is imprisoned and waiting for death. In Pearl Buck's novel, he doesn't really know why he was arrested; the whole thing seems a regrettable and not very exciting accident. In Malraux's novel, the hero knows exactly why he is to be killed; he has deliberately faced death in order to help the revolution. And this keener consciousness, this voluntary purpose, this sense of unity with his comrades, are qualities that transform the story from accident into tragedy.

Again, both Konrad Heiden, a liberal journalist, and Ernst Henri, a Communist journalist, wrote books about the National Socialist Party in Germany. Of the two men, Heiden, the liberal, is better informed and has a better style. Yet the chief impression left by his *History of National Socialism* is one of confusion and bewildering-

ment. Heiden himself revised the manuscript for English publication, and found that after two years he had to change many of his estimates and his prophecies. And the curious thing is that his 1934 changes make the first part of his book less interesting and less permanent than it was in 1932. As for Ernst Henri, the author of *Hitler Over Europe*, he is only a middling good Marxist—and yet good enough to chart the course of events, good enough to write a book that does not need serious revision even now, since it casts light on the future of National Socialism as well as its past.

Yet again, there are two men who have written factual accounts of the tortures they underwent in Nazi concentration camps. One of them, Dr. Seger, was a middle-class Socialist member of the Reichstag; in this country he would probably be a Roosevelt Democrat. The other, Karl Billinger, was an underground Communist organizer. In Seger's book, we have the impression of reading merely a personal horror story. In Billinger's book, there is even more horror, yet the emphasis is elsewhere, being laid on the heroism and solidarity of the German workers. Seger's book is a document; Billinger's belongs to literature.

I don't mean to suggest that any of us can write a book as good as Billinger's *Fatherland* merely by proclaiming our undying allegiance to the proletariat. There is an ostentatious, just-look-at-me sort of revolutionary spirit that it would be well for us to avoid. For my own part, I am not a proletarian writer and I doubt that I shall ever become a proletarian writer. My background and my family and my education were all strictly middle class. I might be described as a highly class-conscious petty-bourgeois critic. But I believe that the interests of my own class lie in a close alliance with the proletariat, and I believe that writers especially can profit by this alliance. Their souls won't be saved and they won't be magically supplied with talent if they have none already. But they will, if they approach the revolutionary movement without pride or illusion or servility, receive certain practical benefits. Literature and revolution are united not only by their common aim of liberating the human spirit, but also by immediate bonds of interest.

## Communism and Literature

BY EARL BROWDER

THE CONGRESS which we are opening to-night is unique in the history of our country. Strange as it may seem at first glance, there has never before been a large gathering of writers, the creators of our fine literature, to consider the problems of their work and its relation to the masses of the population, its relation to the problems of the country. Its significance is attested not only by the notable array of participants, but by this meeting, a mass welcome which expresses a much broader mass interest in the Congress. Like most of the many new things we are experiencing, it is one of the products of the crisis—a crisis which is not confined to our industries, but which is threatening the destruction of the whole cultural heritage.

How does it come about that the secretary of the Communist Party, who has neither the ability nor the time to be able to count himself among the literary creators, is invited to address this Congress, which is overwhelmingly unaffiliated with our Party, at its opening meeting? The answer to this question not only indicates the function of my talk, but throws a bright light on the basic problems of the Congress.

The answer is clear. The overwhelming number of writers who are producing living literature have become conscious, in one degree or another, that the class struggle between capitalists and workers—the two basic forces in modern society—is forcing novelist, dramatist, poet, critic, to choose on which side he shall stand. This Congress consists of those who, having faced the issue, have definitely taken their position on the working class side against the return to barbarism involved in the fascism and war of the decaying capitalist system.

Writers, moving more and more into contact with and participation in the class struggle, have one and all found this current rejuvenating and enriching their artistic work. They have escaped from the corruption that is debasing bourgeois intellectual life. They have found that basic contact with life, for want of which the cultural sphere of capitalist society is rotting and withering away. They have found their place as indispensable forces in the struggle for a better life. In this current they have learned that they are not embarking upon uncharted seas, in some wild adventure for which

sophistication on the part of the audience for Marxist criticism. What I might describe as the preliminary unification served its purpose, but it is being outgrown. Not only are there cogent objections to its over-simplification; it has won the revolutionary movement as a whole and a large mass of sympathetic intellectuals to acceptance of its principles, and in so doing has made further development not only possible but absolutely necessary.

As is inevitable, however, the attempt to correct the defects of the preliminary unification is itself in danger of making opposite but equally serious errors. The pre-occupation with technical problems may lead to formalism, which will let the art-for-art's sake dogma in the back door. The attempt to write criticism in terms of experience and sensibility, rather than ideas and attitudes, may, though certainly sound in itself, lead to vagueness, æstheticism, and a kind of ivory tower. The reaction to sectarianism may lead—and in certain instances, notably the case of Archibald MacLeish's *Panic*, has, it seems to me, already led—to false evaluations and the misconception of class influences.

The strength of Marxist criticism is that it recognizes the social (*i.e.*, class) origins and function of literature. In other words, it recognizes the artist's identity with other men in a real world of economic forces. Its weakness has been that it too frequently ignores those qualities of the artist that distinguish him, as an individual and especially as an artist, from other men. This weakness is not inherent in Marxism but results from the limitations of Marxist critics. It can and should be eliminated. Nothing, however, can be gained, and much may be lost, by sacrificing the strength of Marxism in an attempt to remedy its weakness.

Such dangers, however, though serious enough to warrant consideration, are not truly alarming. The movement is now too strong for excesses or errors of any sort to be long tolerated. The dualism of the *Masses-Liberator* group could persist for a decade because the revolutionary movement in literature was not firmly integrated with the struggles of the proletariat. The sectarianism that was so common in the twenties was a result of the actual isolation of the revolutionary forces from the working class as a whole. To-day, on the other hand, writers of all types are being driven by the menace of war and fascism into the active struggle, and the struggle itself involves more and more of the working class.

Equally important is the existence of a large body of proletarian literature. The impressive diversity of our proletarian poetry, fic-

tion, and drama makes impossible the kind of narrowness that was almost inevitable ten, five, or even three years ago. The critic who is writing about the type of literature that he wishes existed must inevitably seem to dogmatize and prescribe. When, however, he has before him a mass of actual work, representing many kinds of experience, many types of interest, many varieties of talent, he can not only deal with concrete problems but also exert a positive, dynamic influence in the creation of an informed, sensitive body of readers.

Thus we are ready to achieve a far more adequate unification than that I have just commented upon. But let us not suppose that that synthesis will be final. In Rahv's and Phelps' article on criticism in the *Partisan Review* there seems to be an implication—probably not intended by them but certain to be read into the article—that a Marxian æsthetics could and should be developed that would be good for all time. Obviously it is not so. New problems will arise. New errors will have to be corrected. The dialectic process will go on.

## The Proletarian Novel

BY EDWIN SEAVER

I DON'T think the fact is open to question that the most valuable contributions to the American novel during the last several years are to be found in the work of our writers in the left sector. Indeed, we have only to consider subtracting the names of these authors from the roster of contemporary American fiction—such names, let us say, as John Dos Passos, Robert Cantwell, Erskine Caldwell, William Rollins, Waldo Frank, Josephine Herbst, Jack Conroy, Edward Dahlberg, Grace Lumpkin, James Farrell—these and a score of others—we have only to consider subtracting these names to see that there is very little remaining worth mentioning, and that the sum total of this remainder is constantly diminishing.

But the very fact that the body of work created by our revolutionary or proletarian novelists during the last several years is so considerable and so significant makes it impossible for us to deal

adequately with their work in the few minutes at our disposal. I propose, therefore, rather than to examine any particular novels or discuss any particular novelists, to confine myself to the matter of definition.

In spite of the fact that some of our novelists still cling to their obscurantist attitude that sticks and stones may break my bones but definitions, like critics are, in the main, useless, I believe it is important for both novelists and critics to be able to agree upon a generally acceptable definition of the term, proletarian novel. I think it is important because definition implies exclusion of extraneous considerations which are almost always the battleground of futile arguments; because definition implies clarity of purpose—knowing where you are going and why you are on your way—and such clarity of purpose is the first prerequisite of the truly revolutionary artist.

Now obviously the way to define the proletarian novel is to find that unique quality or group of qualities which distinguish it from the novel that, up to recently, we were accustomed to call *the* novel, and which we now call the bourgeois novel. Either such a distinction exists or our use of the term proletarian novel is just so much literary cant.

And in truth some of our critics, even some of those who are close to us, feel that it *is* just that, that the term is nothing more than a label, and a confusing label to boot. These critics are of the opinion that the term proletarian novel cannot be satisfactorily defined, that to use it in literary discussions is something like waving a red rag in front of a bull, and that all discussions based on the term are therefore *a priori* doomed to futility.

I cannot agree with these critics.

I cannot agree with them because if I did I should feel that this Congress was a mistake, that it was called under false pretenses and that we had all much better pack up and go home to muddle along with our books as best we can.

What are we here for? What do we believe in? The fight against war and fascism? True enough. But this is largely a negative statement. Are we not here because we believe in forming a new and Communist ideology within the shell of the old and decaying capitalist society, because we seek the way out of capitalist anarchy toward that socialist order which is now in the process of construction in the Soviet Union, because in essence we subscribe to the Marxian revolutionary analysis of historical change?

This is all very well, it will be said, but what has this to do with Dionysius? You are not talking about aesthetics, about the art of the novel. What you are talking about is entirely a political quality, a matter of economic interpretation, historical viewpoint, philosophy, if you will, but certainly not the art of the novel.

Precisely. Because it is exactly this concern with political orientation, with economic interpretation, with a certain historical perspective, with the materialist dialectic that is the basic distinction of the proletarian novel. Because it is these qualities which are the collective responsibility of the proletarian novelist, and not the aesthetic problem, which is, and always was, an individual concern.

In the last analysis, it is not style, not form, not plot, not even characters, not even the class portrayed that are fundamental in differentiating the proletarian from the bourgeois novel. These are only aspects of the superstructure of the novel which is changing and will continue to change and develop as the political approach of our novelists grows clearer and their political purpose grows more revolutionary.

It will be claimed that I am entirely too sectarian in my definition of the proletarian novel, that I conceive of it merely as a weapon in the struggle of the working class for power, that I deem the proletarian novel to be nothing more than a tool for propaganda, a utility, not an autonomous form of art.

On the contrary, it seems to me that by making the political factor the basic distinction between the proletarian and the bourgeois novel we eliminate a whole cadre of dogmas whose effect is to clog the creative process. We eliminate the sorry confusion that has prevailed and still does prevail in so many discussions about proletarian literature. Such confusion, for instance, as that which assumes that a proletarian novel *must* be written by a worker, or must be about workers, or must be written especially for workers.

The novelist will naturally turn to the milieu with which he is best acquainted for his material and if, as is the case in the United States, most of our writers come from the middle class, their novels are going to be primarily about that class. How many novels have we seen amount to nothing at all because the writer, in his revolutionary zeal, thought it his duty to write about a class whose life and blood had not yet entered his own living fiber, because he thought it his duty to write for a class that was still new and strange to him, and thus wrote forcedly, affectedly and vulgarly? Bad novels are paved with good intentions, proletarian as well as bourgeois, and no

one is less fooled than the workers when they find one of our writers trying to write about that which he knows little or next to nothing, or trying to do the working class a service by writing in words—usually cuss words—of one syllable.

But granted a middle-class writer with the revolutionary comprehension and resolve that the future belongs to the workers, granted such a writer equipped with the Marxian analysis of the decay of the bourgeoisie and the predicament of the petty bourgeoisie under the impact of the capitalist crisis, does this make such a middle-class writer less proletarian than the hypothetical worker-writer who may still even in this time of crisis cling to the skirts of bourgeois ideology? Not at all. As I have said elsewhere, we have only to think of a "worker" like Matthew Woll writing a novel about patriotic workers for the average walking-delegate-minded A. F. of L. member to arrive at a conception that is the complete parody of the proletarian novel. On the other hand, it is possible for an author of middle-class origin to write a novel about petty-bourgeois characters which will appeal primarily to readers of the same class, and yet such a work can come within the classification, proletarian novel.

Why? Because it is not the class origin of the writer which is the determining factor, but his present class loyalties.

Thus, Albert Halper's *The Foundry*, although altogether about workers, does not seem to me to be a genuine proletarian novel, while Josephine Herbst's *The Executioner Waits*, which deals primarily with middle-class folk, most certainly does. Halper's workers are in no way distinguishable from any petty shopkeeper in their outlook upon the world; politically they are unborn. Herbst's middle-class folk, on the other hand, are not only declassed; they are conscious of being declassed, and of a growing unity—through outer and inner necessity—with the militant working class.

Again John Dos Passos' *The 42nd Parallel* and *1919* deal dialectically with the decay of the American bourgeoisie and the growth of the revolutionary temper through the impact of events and the Communist interpretation of those events. But such a novel as Robert Whitcomb's *Talk United States*, although pretending to deal solely with workers, is saturated with that spirit of bourgeois temporizing that marks the direct road to fascism.

In all of these cases I think it is the present class loyalty of the author that is the determining factor, the political orientation of the novelist, and not the class origin, or the class portrayed.

I repeat then, that by making the matter of political orientation

fundamental in the distinction I have drawn between the proletarian and the bourgeois novel, I am not being sectarian, but am striving to eliminate the menace of sectarianism by leaving the whole matter of the novel's superstructure, which is to say the novel as art, entirely up to the individual writer.

Of course, from the long view, what seems in our own time—what *is* and *should be* in our own time—a fighting necessity, may in due perspective appear only as an historical convenience.

Thus, if we were to glance back to the time of the French Revolution we should find critics using consciously and belligerently the term bourgeois literature, in contradistinction to the expiring feudalistic literature, just as we now use the term proletarian literature in contradistinction to the literature of the dying bourgeoisie. A century later, however, when the gains of the French Revolution were already long established and the bourgeoisie firmly in the saddle, critics no longer used the term bourgeois literature. Bourgeois literature had by then become *the universal literature*, precisely because the vision of both novelist and critic tended to be confined within the boundaries of the triumphant bourgeois ideology: both shared in a generally accepted body of ideas.

It is only to-day, as capitalism draws toward its close, that the term has come to be used again, as negatively as it was once used positively, and alongside of the new term, proletarian literature. The inference would seem to be that such terms as bourgeois literature or proletarian literature are what might be called *beginning and end terms*.

They are used only when the ideological superstructure and the materialist base have not become either entirely united or entirely dis-united. They represent the same struggle being conducted on the cultural front, and at the same time, as the struggle on the economic front.

That is why, when you have this dis-unity, as in the United States to-day, it is so necessary to understand the matter of political orientation as basic in any consideration of the proletarian novel. When, on the other hand, as in the Soviet Union, you have eliminated this dis-unity and have new writers immersed in a generally accepted new ideology, then many of the peculiar problems which confront the novelist in our country to-day automatically disappear.

For the proletarian novelist in the United States inhabits two worlds. One of these, the world of capitalism, he sees in the process of decay; the other, a new society forming within the shell of the

old, he sees in the process of formation. As proletarian novelist he must depict both these worlds.

The Soviet novelist, on the other hand, is concerned primarily with conserving the victories of the Revolution and building constructively upon this foundation. There can be a unity in his work that it is difficult, if not impossible, to obtain in the contemporary American novel.

In accordance with the proposition I have stated above, concerning beginning and end terms, we should not expect Soviet novelists to be talking very much any more about proletarian literature in the USSR. And this is true. They talk to-day about Soviet literature, about the literature of the Socialist Fatherland, about the problems of socialist realism and the like.

For proletarian literature is not something they are working toward; it is something that exists indissolubly with the existence of the victorious dictatorship of the proletariat; and in their own country they no longer have to talk about such literature precisely because they have it.

But proletarian literature in the United States—and there is no reason why we need confine ourselves here merely to the novel—proletarian literature in the United States has its roots in the future and in that class which is organizing now to take over the control of that future. It must deal not only with present reality but with reality in the process of becoming.

If it does not deal with the latter—with reality in the process of becoming—then it cannot be proletarian literature.

But if it neglects the former—if it neglects the present reality—it cannot be literature at all.

## The Short Story

BY JAMES T. FARRELL

**I BELIEVE that revolutionary criticism has been particularly negligent in the field of the short story, and not without cause. For the short story does not lend itself readily to that species of over-politicalized and ideologically schematized criticism which has been**

too dishearteningly frequent in the literary sections of revolutionary journals. The short story writer, because of the obvious limitations in space, does not possess the same liberties as does the novelist. In consequence he often discovers that the short story does not permit him to say all that he has to say, and he is limited to dealing in compressed experiences and single, or at best, a few impressions. Hence he must rely on a technique of indirection, and he must utilize implicit rather than explicit methods. And to date, there are various revolutionary critics who have not clearly revealed that they possess the equipment to deal with implication. Because of these reasons, I think that the short story can, perhaps, be considered as a test of the literary perceptibilities of our critics.

Putting aside æsthetic considerations for the moment, and considering the development of literary traditions, we can note the tendency to develop in terms of a succession of patterns, elements of one pattern tending to be assimilated into the succeeding pattern, while other elements are rejected, and so on in a continuing process.

For purposes of illustration, I might refer, in passing, to the Negro in American writing. One pattern of the Negro in American writing is the Uncle Rastus pattern of the dark-skinned Southern Handy Andy. It presents a vaudevilized conception of the Negro, portrays him as obsequious, shiftless, childishly humorous and simple, and makes of him a subject of comedy which, as we know, slurs and disfigures the story of the tragic history of the Negro in capitalistic America. This pattern established a norm of types, habit, characteristics, language, a residuum of conceptions, attitudes and the like which was assumed to be the "spirit" of the Negro. Even to this date the Uncle Rastus pattern of the Negro has not worn thin in American popular writing, and in many American conceptions of the Negro. We meet this pattern, dressed up in spats, in the *Saturday Evening Post* stories of Octavius Roy Cohen. We are tortured by this conception in the movies, and in the radio skit of Amos and Andy. We find that in Stark Young's *So Red the Rose*, the slaves are treated in terms of this pattern or else they are considered as "bad niggers."

While it is easy for us to dismiss writing of this type from a strictly literary point of view, we are inept if we do likewise from a sociological viewpoint. For it quite clearly reflects a class attitude. The Uncle Rastus pattern is a combination of the conventions forced upon the Negro to permit some harmonious interaction between the Negro and the privileged class of whites living on his back on the