CLIFFORD ODETS AND THE GROUP THEATRE PLAYS IN THEIR SOCIAL CONTEXT

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by

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Prefatory Note

Because of the many references made to the plays, it has seemed advisable to abbreviate titles, and to refer in the following manner to Act and Scene divisions and the pagination of the appropriate editions:

WL	Waiting for Lefty
TD	Till the Day I Die
AS	Awake and Sing
PL	Paradise Lost
GB	Golden Boy
RM	Rocket to the Moon
NM	Night Music
II	Act
ii	Scene
/56	Page number

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1

Introduction: The Years 1929 - 1936

Economic Collapse

It is perhaps difficult to say that an era begins or ends at a particular moment; it may be equally risky to label a period of five years or ten years an era; but the world which was true for Clifford Odets did not exist in September, 1929, and did exist in January, 1930.

The event which ushered in Odets' world was the Stock Market crash of 1929, and its consequences. Up until October of that year America was riding on an unprecedented and apparently permanent prosperity wave. President Hoover told the nation "...we shall soon with the help of God be within sight of the day when poverty will be banished from the nation."[1] Irving Fisher, a Wall Street economist, claimed America dwelt on "a permanently high plateau" of prosperity. Fortune, a new magazine issued at the heavy price of ten dollars per year, proclaimed the "generally accepted commonplace that America's great achievement has been Business." John J. Raskob, chairmen of the Democratic National Committee, said in the summer of 1929 "...I am firm in my belief that anyone not only can be rich, but ought to be rich."[2]

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1. Herbert Hoover, State Papers, ed. W.S. Myers, (New York, 1934) II, 426-427.

2. Dixon Wecter, The Age of the Great Depression, (New York, 1948) pp. 1-4.

America was proud of itself, and the Big Bull Market, as the high riding Stock Exchange was called, saw itself as the highest, purest and most successful form of enlightened capitalism.

Then began the downfall. From a peak on September 3, 1929, the Stock Market dropped; to be sure, it surged up again, but this was only momentary. By the end of the month it fell lower and lower, and the pattern continued into October.

Saturday, October 19, was bad. Monday, October 21, was worse. Tuesday slackened, but Wednesday brought unprecedented drops. Then came Black Thursday, October 24, when the great Stock Market panic burst fully. Thirteen million shares changed hands and wild rumors circulated about failures and suicides. The climax came on Tuesday, October 29, when over 16 million shares were traded and innumerable fortunes were dissipated. At the end of the month 15 billion dollars in market value had been wiped out, representing losses to investors.[1] Said the Commercial and Financial Chronicle of November 2, "The present week has witnessed the greatest stock-market catastrophe of the ages." In a few weeks "it had blown into thin air 30 billion dollars."[2]

The Stock Market crash of 1929 brought about the Depression of 1929-1933.

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1. Wecter, p. 12.

2. F.L. Allen, Since Yesterday, (New York, 1946), p.26

The Depression came as a shock. It destroyed the illusion that American capitalism led a charmed life. It put a hamper on business and industry, so that production slackened, wages were cut, many were fired and consumer buying dropped proportionately.

The process was not like a chemical reaction, predictable and observable in all its definite stages. Many in 1930 were aware of the Depression only through their newspapers, despite the fact that one worker in four in the big cities had lost his job.[1] President Hoover opposed Federal relief to the jobless, claiming that handouts were "soul-destroying," and that the economic system would right itself. He wanted to maintain America's "rugged individualism." Yet business declined steadily throughout 1930, and people grew desperate. In 1931 Edmund Wilson could say:

> American optimism has taken a serious beating; the national morale is weak. The energy and the faith for a fresh start seem now not to be forthcoming... what we have lost is, it may be, not merely our way in the economic labyrinth but our conviction of the value of what we are doing.[2]

People began to look for new answers, and one of them was Communism. The Communist Party, which had been relatively innocuous until 1929, emerged after that to capture the hearts of many labourers. In early 1930 it began to

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1. Wecter, p. 17.

2. Edmund Wilson, The Shores of Light, (New York, 1952), pp. 524-525.

foment scattered demonstrations by the unemployed.[1] As faith in American Capitalism wavered, "... the prestige of the Left....began to rise once more."[2]

Things worsened through 1931. 827 banks closed in the United States in September and October of that year. By December ten million people were enemployed, and the mood of America was changing.

> 'Depression shows man as a senseless cog in a senselessly whirling machine which is beyond human understanding and has ceased to serve any purpose but its own.' The worse the machine behaved, the more were men and women driven to try to understand it. As one by one the supposedly fixed principles of business and economics and government went down in ruins, people who had taken these fixed principles for granted... began to try to educate themselves... Ideas were in flux... many of the more forthright liberals were tumbling head over heels into Communism. 3

American intellectuals, through 1930 and 1931

> ... thrashed desperately about to find firm ground in the encompassing quick sand of enemployment and deprivation. They did not turn at once - and of course the majority of them never did - to the far political left... Nevertheless, significant numbers, in these years of the locust, did begin to examine the Communist position. 4

They examined Russia because it seemed the only country in the world where Government acted reasonably. The first Five Year Plan had just been successfully completed, and workers and technicians were in great demand. Russia

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1. Wecter, p. 16.
2. Walter Rideout, The Radical Novel in the United States (Cambridge, Mass., 1956), p. 135.
3. Allen, p. 55.56.
4. Rideout, p. 138.

had apparently made a success of social engineering. Furthermore, Marxism as a philosophy satisfied the intellectuals because it was logical, consistent and complete. It was "... a spiritual refuge...in the shifting waters of despair."[1]

1932 was the cruelest Depression year. Unemployment rose to 12 or 15 million, business lost between 5 and 6 billion dollars, and only one twenty-fourth as many corporations were formed that year as in 1929. Bread lines grew; "Hoovervilles," makeshift and decrepit settlements on the outskirts of towns, increased in number and population; thousands were homeless and more thousands became migrants. The depression worked its evil on the mind as well: after three years of degradation, people lost self respect along with enthusiasm. Scandals were bared, and with each came another disillusionment.

Membership in the Communist Party jumped from nine thousand in 1931 to twenty-five thousand in 1934,[2] while many other intellectuals became "fellow-travellers," i.e., they accepted Party policy but not the Party discipline. The "big men," the economists and bankers, had no answer. Andrew Mellon, ex-Secretary of the Treasury and then Ambassador to England, said in London in 1932, "None of us has any means of knowing when and how we shall emerge from the valley of

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1. Rideout, p. 139.

2. Rideout, p. 141.

depression in which the world is travelling." Montagu Norman, Governor of the Bank of England, said a few months later, "The difficulties are so vast, the forces so unlimited, so novel, and precedents are so lacking, that I approach this whole subject not only in ignorance but in humility. It is too great for me." In America, Charles M. Schwab of Bethlehem Steel said, "... I am afraid, every man is afraid. I don't know, we don't know, whether the values we have are going to be real next month or not."[1]

The New Deal

At the same time another force was blossoming. Franklin D. Roosevelt, Governor of New York, decided to run for the Democratic candidacy in 1932. He was elected on the fourth ballot at the riotous Chicago Convention and began his presidential campaign. Stumping the country from border to border, making as many as sixteen speeches a day, he was elected by a staggering majority of close to seven million votes, and ushered in phase two of the 1930's.

Throughout the land there was fomenting a spirit of rebellion. In Washington, in the summer of 1932, veterans gathered into a "Bonus Expeditionary Force," in order to demand from Congress compensation which was originally due only in 1945. When the Senate voted down the bonus bill,

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1. Allen, pp. 73-75.

many veterans left; the few who remained, however, were dispersed by troops in a bloody riot which created much bitterness.

Farmers all over the land began blockading highways, stopping public auctions by force, and threatening judges in bankruptcy cases. These men were not conscious revolutionaries; they were simply striking back at impersonal forces in whatever way they could.

In such a context any idea was adopted which offered some hope for the future. Howard Scott, a Greenwich Village intellectual, saw his theory of Technocracy suddenly become a national craze. Technocracy, which demanded a reorganization of the price system in accordance with an energy-based formula, would have the country run by technologists. The theory was new, it did not run counter to ingrained prejudices, and best of all, it was scientific in an age which venerated science. It was mystically abstruse and hopeful. There were other suggestions--Huey Long, Senator from Louisiana, proposed a Share-Our-Wealth scheme; Father Coughlin, the "radio priest," called for a revaluation of the currency. But the greatest furor was aroused by Technocracy. During December of 1932 and January of 1933 it reverberated across America; then it died. In the meantime, however, it was indicative of a strong desire on the part of many Americans for a new Saviour, a new belief.

The answer which most Americans accepted, however, was President Roosevelt's New Deal. There were many who disliked this new policy, as it was called; there were many more

who preferred fringe theories such as Communism, but the election results of 1936, when Roosevelt was returned with a huge majority, signified that most of the American people approved of and believed in the New Deal.

Roosevelt was elected in November of 1932, but did not assume office until March of 1933. During that period things happened quickly. In the middle of February the banking system wavered and banks began to close all over the country. The process continued until, on March 4, the day of Roosevelt's Inauguration, the last financial strongholds fell, and Governors Lehman of New York and Horner of Illinois proclaimed state bank holidays. On the last day in which Hoover was in office, he was told that the banking system of the United States had stopped functioning. There seemed to be nothing he could do.

He couldn't, but apparently Roosevelt could. Before a hundred thousand spectators gathered for his Inauguration he boldly spoke these famous words, "the only thing we have to fear is fear itself" —and instituted a whirlwind series of bills and reforms. The banks were reopened and America's currency was put on a sounder basis within the first ten days of his term of office. The newspapers supported Roosevelt, Congress followed his wishes, and the people suddenly were behind him almost to a man. Encouraged by this, Roosevelt's new administration continued to produce new legislation at a furious rate. Bills were passed devaluating the dollar, protecting the farmer, stimulating employment, lightening the debt burden, instituting financial reforms, developing natural

resources, and, perhaps most readily appreciated by the people, inaugurating a sweeping system of Federal relief in direct contrast to the policy of Hoover. Roosevelt's National Industrial Recovery Act sought to spread employment by shortening labour hours, setting a minimum for wages, allowing business to govern itself, while at the same time letting the government regulate the business system, and raising wages in the hope that increased purchasing power would benefit all.

The New Deal was different from the Hoover policy in that it attacked rather than defended. The emphasis was on the common man, not on the plight of the bankers; in fact, Roosevelt showed a marked distrust of the big men on Wall Street. The government was willing to expand; unions were encouraged; the government had moved more than slightly toward the left.

Business began to revive; industrial production rose 67% from March to July, 1933; the Stock Market became active; but underneath there still lurked the heritage of the Depression - millions still jobless, farmers rebellious and rioting; and then came a drop from the July peak of production and Market prices. On the surface there was the great shining hope of the New Deal, but many were distrustful.

This hope, too, was to fade. After July the economy began to recede. The N.R.A. did not work out as well as had been hoped. Employers used any evil means to circumvent it. Business was proved too corrupt to be allowed self-rule. By the winter of 1933 the New Deal had lost a great deal of its lustre. The radicals were impatient; the farmers did not see any immediate benefits; labour was not too much better off than

before because the N.R.A. was not being fully enforced with regard to union freedom; and businessmen were afraid of Roosevelt's seemingly wild and capricious policies.

The New Deal became increasingly socialistic. In 1935 the Social Security Act was passed, and the Works Progress Administration (later called the Work Projects Administration) set out to provide relief on a gigantic scale. The courts, however, fought Governmental interference in business. In May of 1935 the Supreme Court invalidated the N.R.A.

Natural Disasters

After the New Deal "honeymoon" was over, nature itself seemed to go against the people. On November 11, 1933, the first great Dust Storm swept across South Dakota. This was followed through the winter by similar storms along the farm belt from Texas to Canada. Farms were blown away, roads and railroads obliterated and thousands of people were left homeless and without much sustenance. Many became refugees, migrants across the country in search of security. In many places they encountered only hostility and violence.

In those areas where the farms survived or were unharmed, a new evil arose. Many small farms were combined into big ones, to be run by machines. Tenant farmers were evicted and the sharecroppers were usurped by cotton-picking machines. This produced a "huge, roving, landless proletariat of the land, helpless if unorganized, menacing if organized because it had no stake in the land and its settled institutions."[1]

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1. Allen, pp. 208.

Another series of disasters occured in late 1936 and 1937. The rivers went on a rampage, flooding, killing and causing millions of dollars worth of damage. A month after the peak of the floods, 300,000 still remained homeless.

These calamities - unemployment in the cities, the dust bowl storms and the rivers' damage - left many homeless migrants who would be ripe for a new ideology.

The Ideological Ferment

Contributing to the spread of any ideology must be a need for it, a search for belief by someone. If the time is not ripe, no philosophy will flourish. In the 1930's after the Depression people began to examine their society; they began to study economics, to attend forums and take a lively interest in federal affairs. They developed a social consciousness.

> 'If, in the year 1925... you had gone to a cocktail party...you would probably have heard some of the following beliefs expressed:-
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> That there ought to be more personal freedom, particularly sex freedom.
> That reformers were an abomination and there were too many laws.
> That Babbitts, Rotarians, and boosters, and indeed American business men in general, were hopelessly crass.
> That the masses of the citizenry were dolts with 13-year old minds.
> That most of the heroes of historical tradition, and especially of Victorian and Puritan tradition, were vastly overrated and needed 'debunking'.
> That America was such a standardized, machine-ridden and convention-ridden place that people with brains and taste naturally preferred the free atmosphere of Europe.

...If, after ...ten years you had strayed into a similar gathering, ...you would probably have heard some of the following beliefs expressed:-

That reform - economic reform, to be sure, but nevertheless reform by law - was badly needed, and there ought to be more stringent laws. (Some members of the company might even scout reform as useless pending the clean sweep of capitalist institutions which must be made by the inevitable Communist Revolution).

That the masses of the citizenry were the people who really mattered, the most fitting subjects for writer and artist, the people on whose behalf reform must be overtaken. (Indeed, if you had listened carefully you might have heard a literary critic who had been gently nurtured in the politest of environments referring to himself as a proletarian, so belligerently did he identify himself with the masses).

That America was the most fascinating place of all and the chief hope for freedom; that it was worth studying and depicting in all its phases but particularly in those uglier phases that cried most loudly for correction; and that it was worth working loyally to save, though perhaps it was beyond saving and was going to collapse along with the rest of civilization. 1

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1. Allen, pp. 250-252.

Civilization had something drastically wrong with it, and it had to be saved. To the Marxist it could only be saved by revolution, i.e., no lasting change could be achieved within a capitalistic-democratic framework.

According to the Marxist analysis, the class is the unit of social relationships, not the individual; the class is the dynamic factor in social change, and the basis of social institutions and values.

The class is an economic concept, is formed by economic interests. Capitalism is a class economy - where ownership is separate from labor, private gain has nothing to do with public or social gain, production is isolated from consumption.

This results in an irreconcileable difference between the interests of labour and the interests of ownership, bringing about a perpetual conflict between the two classes. Such an economy, to the Marxist, concentrates ownership and the means of production in the hands of a few, makes the working classes dependent upon the goodwill of these few, and gives vast privileges to these few while alloting few opportunities to labour. In such an economy profit determines productivity; there is a great inequality in the distribution of the benefits of production; waste, insecurity and misery are justified in the name of profit; in short, such an economy is generous to the few and barbarous to the many. This results in two distinct classes, with conflicting interests, and the relationship between these classes is the dominant factor in capitalist society.[1]

In such a society the individual must function as a part of his class. The presence of the middle class does not rule out the two-class theory; those of the middle-class whose livelihood is dependent on labour belong to the working class; those whose livelihood is dependent upon owning the means of production are to be considered members of the upper class.

The middle-class, to the Marxist, is rootless, shifting, transitory. It is losing its independence by being made propertyless, as society tends more and more to split up into two hard and fast categories, the

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1. Zalmen Slesinger, Education and the Class Struggle, (New York 1937) pp. 59-60.

bourgeoisie and the proletariat. The middle-class mentality, with rootless social ideologies, merits careful attention in any plan to reconstruct a capitalist class economy.[1]

Class relationships are not entirely economic, but even the non-economic relationships are economically-founded, in that the classes themselves are the result of economic forces. Thus a dichotomy in the economic structure results in a dichotomy in the total structure. All aspects assume a class quality. This produces a class mentality and ideology. The dominant class shapes the laws, religions, morals, arts, letters and science of the whole society after its own interests. "...the ruling ideas and values are essentially the ideas and values of the ruling class."[2]

Thus the state is not a neutral and impartial power but the tool of the dominant class. It protects the exploiters against the exploited. Class relationships become the dominance of the propertied over the propertyless, and the subservience of the state to the upper class perpetuates this.

All concessions granted to labour are in the interest of ownership; thus even a social service state is a class state in that help from the upper class is not granted philanthropically but prudently.

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1. See Harold Clurman's appendix to Paradise Lost in Clifford Odets, Six Plays of Clifford Odets, (New York, 1939) p. 423-427.

2. Slesinger, p. 64.

Culture is a class instrument. The dominant class harnesses the ideological forces so that they function in their interests. This cultivates a social mentality throughout all of society which justifies the existing social order and precludes any radical change. One part of culture reflects, and the rest is made subservient to, the beliefs of the dominant class.

There are, however, the Marxist maintains, some cultural patterns and forces which reflect the interests of labour. If there were not, the masses would be doomed. In a capitalist society, however, that which clashes with the dominant culture is diverted from the masses, or suppressed, or rendered dormant.

The class concept, it must be emphasized, does not regard society as dormant. The Marxist is constructive as well as destructive. The class concept implies stress and change, the Marxist claims. There is a perpetual struggle between the dominant class and the exploited one.

The class in power denounces the existence of this war. Should the dominated class recognize the existence of the war, then it would attempt self-liberation. Thus the class concept, depending upon how one looks at it, is an instrument for halting or instituting social change; it is a dynamic concept.

Change, then, can only occur on a class level. The realization by labour of the existence of a class society, in all its ramifications, unifies it. It is then ready to effect social change. This must be preceded by a nullification of the class struggle, which implies political revolution.

Class antagonism alone can effect social change. The economic system must be transformed, political power must be transferred from the upper class to the lower. The upper class will not surrender it willingly; therefore it must be taken by force.

What the lower class wishes is to force social theories and institutions into compliance with production. The worker wants a unified and reasonably interdependent economy, collectivist and not based on profit. His wages must be a fair reward for his labour.

Seizing the state is the first step toward achieving this. The worker is not contending with the capitalist for control of the state; rather, he seeks control only in order to reform the state; i.e., he struggles against the state. In order to overthrow the capitalists the workers must first win the political power to make the state their organ, for the state, as it is, is a tool of the capitalists.

Change, therefore, can be effected by class, not democratic, techniques; i.e., democracy at its best is still incapable of producing a good system.[1] Political power must be transferred from those who control production to those who subsist on its continuance.

To function as an instrument of change, the class must be conscious of its purpose. In a capitalist society the dominant class is always aware of the struggle; therefore the class concept works always as an instrument against social change.

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1. See Rocket to the Moon, p. 148.

The subject class, however, is not necessarily conscious, in full or in part, of its role in society; therefore class conditions do not necessarily foster class-consciousness on the part of labour; rather, they tend to suppress it, and to inculcate a classless ideology in the minds of the exploited. Therefore society is class-structured, but not necessarily class-conscious.

The Marxist educator, then, be he teacher or poet or whatever, must awaken a class-consciousness among the masses. He must reconstruct the classless mentality of the masses into a class mentality. The democratic tradition hinders this by concealing class conditions from the masses, and that is why the development of class-consciousness has been so slow in America. The Marxist educator must battle the evil influence of democracy, which he regards as "... a deplorably deficient instrument for ridding our social order of its present evils..."[1] All of society must be changed, not only the economic system. Since the non-economic as well as the economic mentalities of a class society have an economic origin, class-consciousness can only be aroused when all values are reconstructed.

This is the basic Marxist argument.

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1. Slesinger, pp 74-75.

Leftist Literature of the Times

Several proletarian novels appeared prior to the period under study, among them Agnes Smedley's Daughter of Earth, 1929, a semi-autobiographical account of the education of a revolutionary, and Michael Gold's Jews Without Money, 1930, a series of related sketches conveying the poverty, fear and degradation of tenement life, and the overwhelming excitement felt by man accepting Communism. Gold is important for reasons other than this; in 1921, writing in The Liberator, he was perhaps the first to herald the new radical writing which would come "as a concommitant to the rise of the world proletariat."[1] More immediately, it was a review by him of Thornton Wilder,[2] attacking Wilder's message in terms of its lack of immediate and hopeful guidance, a review which generated a furious controversy, which can be said to be responsible, perhaps more than any other single event, for bringing Marxist criticism to the forefront of public notice and thereby generating vast interest in, enthusiasm for, and production of "proletarian" liberature.

Another forerunner was John Dos Passos, who published Manhattan Transfer in 1926. This book is a bitter denunciation of machine-like American society, but beyond this Dos Passos cannot be considered a militant leftist. He seems more to have sought a reform of America, a rebuilding of democracy, than a revolution and a dictatorship by the proletariat.

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1. Michael Gold, "Towards Proletarian Art," The Liberator, IV, (February, 1921), p. 23.
2. Michael Gold, "Wilder: Prophet of the Genteel Christ," The New Republic, LXIV (Fall Literary Section, 1930), p. 266.

His trilogy U.S.A., completed in 1934, does end on a communistic note, but Manhattan Transfer was written before the Sacco-Vanzetti affair, the Crash and the Depression.

The growth of proletarian literature was most rapid between 1932 and 1935. Itdid not at any time dominate the American literary scene, but enough of it was written after the Crash so that by 1935 it had become a distinct literary category. In comparison with the isolated cries of the twenties, many new voices joined the leftist ranks as the Depression set in.

> ... What we are seeing today is the emergence of a galaxy of young novelists...who have discovered...that art is more than a parlour game to amuse soulful parasites, that the American workers, farmers and professionals are the true nation, and that the only major theme of our time is the fate of these people. 1
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> Great hope was held for this literature.
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> 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. ...we have here the beginnings of an American literature, one which will grow in insight and in power with the growth of the American working class now beginning to tread its historic path toward the new world. 2

What emerged was not a galaxy numerically or artistically, but a steady flow. In all, about seventy radical novels were published between 1930 and 1939, fifty of them before 1935.[5]

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1. Proletarian Literature in the United States, ed. Granville Hicks and others, (New York, 1935) p. 33.

2. Proletarian Literature, pp. 19-20,

3. Hideout, p. 171.

The proletarian novels tended to fall into 4 categories; some dealt with a strike, some depicted the development of a hero's class-consciousness, some dealt with the lowest levels of society and others described the decay of the middle class. A few contained a mixture of these themes.

The best of the strike books is Robert Cantwell's The Land of Plenty, dealing with a spontaneous uprising in a wood-veneer factory on the West Coast. Another is Clara Weatherwax's Marching! Marching!, 1935, set as well on the west coast.

Eighteen novels of the era deal with an individual's "illunimation." There are two types, depicting the awakening of a downtrodden and abused worker or the conversion of a middle-class bourgeois. James Steele's Conveyor is an example of the first, in which Jim Brogan, an "average worker," learns the hard way to accept Communism. Thomas Boyd's In Time of Peace is an example of the second type, in which his hero, a white-collar worker, is unable to earn a living and so decides to fight the class war. Jack Conroy's The Disinherited is distinctive in that its hero wanders picaresque-like while he "grows up."

In the strike and conversion novels the message is explicit; in the novels which deal with the wretched lower classes, however, the message tends to be implicit. The reader is assailed by descriptions which should direct him to only one conclusion, but he must form it for himself.

Among such novels of failure, of the down-and-outs, is Edward Dahlberg's Bottom Dogs. The title of this novel gave a popular name to that genre of writing. Nelson Algren's Somebody in Boots treats the life of Cass McKay, who is battered by fortune continuously. Perhaps the best of this group is Henry Roth's Call It Sleep, the record of a Jewish immigrant child in the lower East Side of New York, from the age of 6 to 8. It is imaginative and transmits its vision forcefully. Since the book ends with the hero still a child, there is no conscious step forward, but the impression given is that David, the young protagonist, will probably grow to be a radical.

The fourth type of novel dealt with middle class decay. Many works in this category earned a further - or only - merit by depicting at the same time a revolutionary upgrowth. James Farrell's trilogy Studs Lonigan has the hero dying while the Communists parade in the streets. Josephine Herbst also produced a proletarian trilogy which traces the lives of a family from 1868 to 1937. Her books - Pity Is Not Enough, The Executioner Waits and Rope of Gold - end with the class lines drawn, with an actual barricade and civil strife. The novels in this category all make more-or-less the same point - that the middle class, which once obscured the operation of Marxist laws in American capitalism, is now disintegrating before the clearly defined emergence of the two opposing classes.

Several minor themes are involved in certain of the proletarian movels. Edward Dahlberg's Those Who Perish concerns a Jewish heroine who adopts Communism as the only hope for the future in a world menaced by Fascist anti-Semitism; Grace Lumpkin's A Sign for Cain treats anti-Negro discrimination in the South, out of which its hero turns to the Left; Theodore Irwin's Strange Passage talks of the deportation of aliens, and William Cunningham's Pretty Boy analyses the life of the gangster Pretty Boy Floyd in terms of economic pressure.

Strangely, only one novel was written on the experiences of a party member. Edward Newhouse's This Is Your Day, 1937, deals with the life of an organizer and was widely hailed when it appeared, but it stands alone as a type. Martin Delaney's Journal of a Young Man, while dealing with the life of a Party member, focuses too much on the hero's love troubles to be properly called an essentially Leftist work along the lines of This Is Your Day.

It is possible to isolate certain common traits among all these differing works, certain beliefs, certain symbols and representative or personified forces. These arise, obviously, out of the common Marxist view of capitalism, with its contradictions and exploitative relationships, and run as follows:

Business ethics are the ethics of animals, of the jungle. Police, the agents of the dominating class, are often brutal to strikers and any deviants from the ruling-class line.

This brutality is demonstrated to stem from the institutions which capitalism has set up to protect itself.

The well-being of the few costs much from the many. Capitalist justice, another tool it sets up to maintain itself, is class justice; it preserves property relationships. Justice is "a conspiracy of one class against another."[1]

All parts of business unite to maintain this situation, but newspapers especially come in for attack. Instead of being a free press, most are organs of the dominating class, and twist everything accordingly. Bankers and politicans are loathsome tools or sche ming fascists - competitive capitalism breeds corruption.

In accordance with the Party line, set down in The Communist, the early New Deal is social fascism. The N.R.A. is being used for the disadvantage of the workers. Union leaders are corrupt, the tools of the capitalists, interested only in money or power.

The universities are reactionary; professionals are weakling conservatives. Those intellectuals who do not labour for the workers' cause are useless and wasteful. "Their bourgeois culture glistens like a dung heap, stinks like a corpse, with decay."[2]

The Marxists have little use for Religion; it is the "opiate of the masses," another protective institution designed to prevent the masses from becoming class-conscious.

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1. Rideout, p. 200.

2. Rideout, p, 202.

Usually, if religion is brought into a strike context, the clergy side with ownership, and those who don't are ostracized by the respectable. Even non-institutionalized religion is ignored. If the Marxists have any religion at all, it is Marxism itself, scientific and progressive rather than superstitions and reactionary.

A consistent tolerance for minorities is shown. William Cunningham's The Green Corn Rebellion contains a brutal anti-Negro incident which is ostensibly a feature of American capitalistic society; Grace Lumpkin's A Sign for Cain depicts a horrible lynching; anti-Semitism and all nationalistic antagonisms are denounced, while proletarian universalism is praised.

Militarism, imperialism and war are condemned. The slogan "It was a rich man's war and poor man's fight" is popular. War is the capitalist drive for markets; there should be only one war, and that is between the classes; in this way the proletarian novelists are not pacifistic. The function of the Army and the National Guard in peacetime is to break strikes and contain working-class discontent.

The workers usually are good people, while the capitalists manifest almost every evil man is capable of. As a rule, in addition, the protagonists are usually better-drawn and rounded than the villains, who generally remain static. The bourgeois may be "physically unattractive or diseased, hypocritical, false and greedy, neurotic, anti-intellectual, and spiritually dry, incapable of affection even for wife and family, and highly prone, in their

filthy-mindedness, to sexual promiscuity. ...few bourgois sex lives are normal... [they] have a penchant for the gaudier perversions... the indidence of homosexuality...is...high ... One suspects that for the proletarian novelist homosexuality came to stand arbitrarily as a convenient, all-inclusive symptom of capitalist decay.[1] All of these faults, of course, had an ecomomic basis.

Thus while some of the workers in these novels have faults, they are always reparable. The bourgeoisie, however, is dying, and cannot be cured.

The concept of unity is the Golden Rule. Solidarity should bring successful mass action. For a worker to find his soul, to discover his true self, he must submerge himself in the unified group , in the masses. Enlightenment brings unity, unity brings concerted effort and only concerted effort can effect a revolution.

In general, then, it can be said that all the proletarian writers had one common purpose, at least, up to 1935: to foment a revolution with all possible speed.

1935 was the peak year for proletarian novels. In that year a review digest listed "Proletarian Literature" for the first time as a distinct fiction classification. Granville Hicks published a revised edition of his The Great Tradition, which contained a new chapter on proletarian literature in the United States, and later in the year an

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1. Rideout, p. 218.

anthology, Proletarian Literature in the United States, proudly trumpeted a new literary phenomenon which it predicted would soon dominate U.S. letters. The New Masses held a contest for a novel "written from both the viewpoint of and about the proletariat,"[1] and the winner, Clara Weatherwax's Marching! Marching!, was greeted with excitement. The outstanding event, nevertheless, was the first American Writer's Congress, April 26, 1935, which would "develop the possibilities for wider distribution of revolutionary books and the improvement of the revolutionary press,"[2] and otherwise further the revolutionary effort. This Congress would create the League of American Writers, which would affiliate itself with the International Union of Revolutionary Writers, a Soviet-sponsored organization.

After 1935, however, proletarian novels were produced in far smaller quantities and with less passion. In one year, from 1935 to 1936, the number dropped by 60%. Joseph Freeman, who, in the Introduction to Proletarian Literature in the United States, 1935, had been able to carol the emergence of "a galaxy of young novelists,"[3] spoke in 1936, using the past tense, of "those radical writers who in the 'sectarian' days were engaged in advancing what used to be called proletarian literature."[4]

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1. Rideout, p. 238.

2. 'Call For an American Writer's Congress,' New Masses, XIV (January 22, 1935), p. 20.

3. Proletarian Literature, p. 33.

4. Joseph Freeman, 'John Reed,' New Masses. XIX, (June 16, 1936) 23.

Only two interpretations are possible here; either the proletarian writers stopped writing, or their work changed so that they no longer wrote "proletarian" novels.

With regard to the former, several theories have been offered. Some would have it that, having once fictionalized a conversion or a strike, the proletarian writer then has to wait, to go out and gain new experiences, in order to be able to write freshly and not be forced to refashion old material.

Another segment claims the refusal of capitalist publishers to publish revolutionary novels as causing the decline. The taste of the public could not be blamed, for even at the peak the novels sold badly. The most successful - Richard Cantwell's Land of Plenty had sales of only 3000.[1] "From the very beginning the novels of social protest received a critical attention that was out of all proportion to their popularity."[2]

A further claim has it that the Marxist novelists were searching for fresh subject-matter. Adverse critics claim that these writers may finally have realized that proletarian literature, with small sales and not unusually large lending-library turnover, just did not reach the proletariat. Hollywood was pictured by some as the gilded circe which drew many Marxist novelists from their path. If this is true, and if the New Deal siphoned off even more, then those writers who heeded this alien call could not have been too

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1. Rideout, p. 235.

2. Malcom Cowley, 'A Farewell to the 1930's,' New Republic, CI. (November 8, 1934), p.43.

sincere to begin with.

The best reason offered is the political reversal of the Communist Party after 1935, when it adopted the People's or Popular Front. This shifted the emphasis from capitalism to fascism. All communists now had to aid the rest of America to battle the fascist forces; i.e., the communists were required to work hand in hand with the "capitalists" and "middle-class petty-bourgeois" whom they had only just excoriated.

Through this manouever the Party itself gained in ranks from 30,000 members in 1935 to 75,000 in 1938[1] but the Marxist writers were apparently not able to keep up with the shifting Party line. "If the radically oriented writer had, at least for the moment, to accept capitalist democracy...he could not emphasize the class divisions implicit in a strike, he could not document the disintegration of the middle-class... Literature must no longer be declared a class weapon, but simply a weapon; and the weapon must be used, not against capitalism, the proletariat's oppressor, but against Fascism, the oppressor of the 'people.'"[2]

Poetry & Short Fiction

Beyond the novel, other art forms too were adopted for Marxist purposes. The short story lent itself readily to depictions of violence and persecution with an economic basis. The various leftist publications such as the New Masses and Partisan Review were filled with examples of agitational tales. The fiction section of Proletarian Literature in the United States, that hopeful but doomed

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1. Rideout, p. 243.

2. Rideout, pp. 243-244.

monument to a literary flash-in-the-pan, contains work by such different men as Erskine Caldwell, John Dos Passos, James Farrell and Michael Gold. Their stories were usually shocking, as if the writers sought to hit back at life just as hard as it had hit their sensibilities. They sought to purge and educate through shock.

The revolutionary poetry of the period was varied in form but not in content. It had a basis in the Marxist poetry of England as produced by W.H. Auden, Stephen Spender, C. Day Lewis and Louis MacNiece. These poets all were critical of capitalist society, and managed to express their opinions in an exciting variety of poetic forms and techniques.

American poetry, however, was not so distinguished. Muriel Rukeyser and Kenneth Fearing were reasonably proficient, but neither was as outstanding as any of the English quartette. Miss Rukeyser's long poems Theory of Flight, 1935, and U.S. 1, 1938, are obscurely symbolic and deathly serious, rendering them without much force. Fearing's work, mostly short poems in collections - Angel Arms, 1929, and Poems, 1935 - are effective, wisecracking and smooth, but will probably not prove too durable once their immediacy has expired.

The major U.S. Marxist poet was Archibald MacLeish, who took a definite leftist stand with the publication of the volume Public Speech in 1936. MacLeish wholeheartedly accepted Joseph Freeman's exhortation:

"Either the man had to follow the poet back to the camp of the bourgeoise, or the poet had to follow the man forward into the camp of the proletariat. Those who chose the latter course accepted the fact that art has a class basis; they realized that in a revolutionary period...poetry is inseparable from politics."[1]

The general run of Marxist poets, were, however, mediocre at best. In the Introduction to the poetry section of Proletarian Literature in the United States two points are belabored; one, "that poets cannot be asocial at their writing tables and social minded elsewhere, and that to write as whole men they must take their drive from their political convictions and their subject matter from the class struggle,"[2] and that proletarian poetry does not lack variety, that it is not "as wearying as firecrackers at 6 P.M. on July Fourth."[3] The material offered, however, seems to disprove both of these claims.

The first poem is Maxwell Bodenheim's To A Revolutionary Girl, which contains the following lines.

> ... you are a girl,
> A revolutionist, a worker
> Sworn to give the last, undaunted jerk
> Of your body and every atom
> Of your mind and heart
> To every other worker
> In the slow, hard fight
> That leads to barricade, to victory
> Against the ruling swine.(4)

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1. Proletarian Literature, p.20.
2. Proletarian Literature, p.145.
3. Proletarian Literature, p.147.
4. Proletarian Literature, p.147.

The next poem, Stanley Brunshaw's I, Jim Rogers, ends.

> Tell her I offer this
> In these days of our marking time,
> Till our numberless scattered millions
> In mill, farm and sweatshop
> Straining with arms for rebellion,
> Tie up our forces together
> To salvage this earth from despair
> And make it fit for the living. (1)

Some are relatively witty such as Langston Hughes' Park Bench.

> I live on a park bench
> you, Park Avenue.
> Hell of a distance,
> Between us two.
>
> I beg a dime for dinner -
> You got a butler and maid.
> But I'm wakin' up!
> Say, ain't you afraid.
>
> That I might, just maybe,
> In a year or two,
> Move on over
> To Park Avenue? 2

Don West's Southern Lullaby contains the invocation.

> 'Eat, little baby, eat well,
> A Bolshevik you'll be,
> And hate this bosses' hell -
> Sucking it in from me. 3

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1. Proletarian Literature, p. 152.
2. Proletarian Literature, p. 168.
3. Proletarian Literature, p. 199.

Criticism

Accompanying the proletarian literary upsurge of 1930-1935 was a companion growth of Communist criticism. This became widespread after Michael Gold's celebrated attack on Thornton Wilder,[1] but it soon splintered, and by 1935 the year of its greatest output, it had grown into two opposing camps of values.

"To be a Marxist writer in the early thrities was to give one's work a new dignity and ennobling seriousness,"[2] but what precisely was a Marxist writer? Was he a proletarian himself, or did he just write about the proletariat? Further, proletarian literature was supposed to be the literature of revolution, but some set up two categories. Proletarian literature, they said, analyzed society but was not more revolutionary than that society itself, while revolutionary literature inculcated a desire to overthrow capitalism. They admitted, however, that both types tended to blend as a revolutionary situation grew.

There arose, therefore, especially after 1930, a Marxist criticism which reviewed and judged books in terms of their revolutionary value. This occasioned a further split among the Leftists. There were, those who valued a book's contents only, i.e., its propaganda message; others declared that

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1. See p. 19.

2. Alfred Kazin, On Native Grounds, (New York, 1942) p. 376.

artistic stamdards were not to be junked in favour of immediacy, that proletarian literature should attempt to be art as well as a weapon. The chief protagonists of the former view were Michael Gold and Granville Hicks of The New Masses magazine, and they were opposed by many, notably James Farrell, and the Partisan Review. Hicks and Gold believed "that literature can almost automatically be evaluated according to the degree to which it consciously illuminates the class struggle and explicitly affirms allegiance to the proletariat."[1] The Partisan Review, led chiefly by Phillip Rahr and Wallace Phillips, contended in 1934 that "political content should not be isolated from the rest of experience but must be merged into the creation of complete personalities and the perception of human relations in their physical and sensual immediacy."[2] They held to the middle road, insisting on art as well as propaganda. By 1936, after the publication of James Farrell's A Note on Literary Criticism, the 'Centrists' of Partisan Review leanings had won a majority of the field, with only diehards such as Gold still adhering to the "Leftist" or propaganda-over-art belief.

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1. Rideout, p. 227.

2. Wallace Phelps & Phillip Rahv, 'Problems & Perspectives in Revolutionary Literature,' Partisan Review, I, (June-July 1934), page 8.

This Factionalism, however, is a sign that there existed a healthy and rambunctious coterie of Marxist critics in the 1930's.

Up till then Marxist criticism had been sporadic and local, consisting in a large part of articles and reviews in The Liberator by such people as Michael Gold. In 1928, when Gold began to edit The New Masses, an explicit Marxist criticism arose. "...leftism was so much a part of the intellectual atmosphere that many critics in and out of the party, admired or disapproved of writers almost exclusively on the grounds of their political sentiments."[1]

Marxist opinion was expressed chiefly in little magazines until the 1930's. These magazines form a slim link carrying the revolutionary spirit across the relatively barren twenties until it burst in the 1930's. The Masses, the foremost pre-War 1 and wartime periodical, became a wartime casualty. It was disbanded in 1918 and its editors placed on trial as "reds", as enemies of America. In that same year a successor made its appearance, The Liberator. The Liberator was pledged to a curious policy of Leftist politics but free art, and it served as a trumpet and a meeting-ground for radicals and literateurs. Influential among the intellectuals, for some years its circulation reached 50,000.

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1. William Van O'Connor, An Age of Criticism, (Chicago, 1952), p. 118.

It was owned by Max and Crystal Eastman.

In February of 1921 it published Michael Gold's "Towards Proletarian Art" which called for the artist to identify himself with the workers in the class war. The magazine also published, between October 1923 to October 1924, a series of articles by Floyd Dell, "Literature and the Machine Age," which were perhaps the earliest attempt to criticize a variety of works in the light of Communist principles. The last issue of the Liberator appeared in October of 1924, when it combined with other magazines to form The Workers Monthly, a strict Party organ.

To continue the Masses' tradition there remained V.F. Calverton's Modern Quarterly, founded in 1923, later called Modern Monthly. While later it would split from official party discipline, until 1928 it was welcomed by the Communists. In it Calverton looked forward to "proletarian literature" which would be realistic, comprehensive and collectivist.

In May, 1926, appeared another and more important periodical, The New Masses. It vacillated for two years until Michael Gold became the sole editor; then aided by Joseph Freeman, it moved more closely into the orbit of the Party. It then declined until the Crash of 1929, when it was at last ready to "act its role as a catalytic agent for the combination of literature and revolution."[1]

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1. Rideout, p. 131.

One further note must be made. The Partisan Review, which began as a Communist periodical and which played a large part in the form-versus-content controversy[1] was founded well into the 1930's, and soon drifted away from Party discipline and Stalinist adulation.

Four of the outstanding Marxist critics of the late 1920's and early 1930's were V.F. Calverton, V.L. Parrington, Granville Hicks and Bernard Smith. Calverton, in Modern Quarterly, dictated aesthetic principles from a Marxist basis. Language, he held, should not be experimented with as James Joyce, T.S. Eliot or E.E. Cummings had done; it should be used for "social communication;" to have value, literature must "attain a social beauty," whatever that is. His The Liberation of American Literature, 1932, heralds the new work that will be coming now that one can appreciate the depths of middle-class decay and the glory of the coming proletarian collectivist society and literature.

V.L. Parrington's Main Currents in American Thought, (1927 and 1930) treated American literature almost solely in terms of politics and economics. Granville Hicks, while he was a communist, followed the Party line. The Great Tradition, (1933) analyzed a great deal of American literature in the same light as Parrington's. Bernard Smith's Forces in American Criticism does likewise, but is millitantly Marxist. In its concluding chapter, Smith's book proclaims the superiority of Marxist criticism to all others.

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1. See p.34

"To determine the character and value of the work we must... understand... the social forces that produced the ideology it expresses as an attitude toward life. Marxism enables us to understand those forces by explaining the dialectical relationships of a culture to an economy and of that culture to the classes which exist in that economy. At the same time, by revealing the creative role of the proletariat in establishing a communist society, which alone can realize universal peace and well-being, Marxism offers a scale of value.[1]

James T. Farrell's A. Note on Literary Criticism is partly an attack on these men. Farrell claims "that no single emphasis can serve to exhaust the values and meanings in a literary work; however important the political may be, it does not preclude other emphases, the psychological, the moral, the biographical, or the aesthetic."[2]

Aside from these few systematic organizations, the majority of Marxist criticisms consisted of polemics, reviews, counter-reviews, polemics in reply to polemics, conversation and speeches. It was characteristically militant and triumpeting, and was amazingly short-lived in view of the furor it aroused. It developed after 1930, and died after 1935 or-6, when it was discouraged by the policy of the People's Front. In general, even the Marxist writers themselves

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1. Bernard Smith, Forces In American Criticism (New York, 1939) pp. 287-288

2. O'Connor, p. 124

had little respect for it.

Drama

Notice must be taken of several plays which preceded the proletarian drama of the 1930's. Some of these were social but not revolutionary dramas; they criticised society, but did not propose a definite political viewpoint as the only answer.

In Europe Ernst Toller wrote plays calling for social action but of a non-violent type. Man and The Masses, produced in New York in 1924, deals with an abortive uprising by workers against a capitalist State, and seems to seek "a bloodless road to progress."[1] The Machine Wreckers, which harks back to Gerhard Hauptmann's The Weavers in its choice of protagonists, stresses capitalist exploitation of workers in production. Hinkemann, written in jail along with the other two plays, shows how life-as capitalism controls it - has ruined a good man. Other "revolutionary" plays in Europe at that time are Fredrich Wolf's The Sailors of Cattaro, which treats a mutiny, and Jules Romains' The Dictator, 1926 which pictures a man's energy channelled into wrong efforts by a drive to power.

Among the earliest American social critics was Elmer Rice, whose The Adding Machine appeared in 1923. The play's hero, Mr. Zero, is a white-collar cipher. "He stands... as...the ignorant, inhibited slave-soul produced by capitalist

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1. Anita Block, The Changing World in Plays & Theatre, (Boston, 1939), p. 204

civilization."[1] While not militantly radical, Rice describes a class - the lowest - whose whole life is conditioned by the social war.

In 1929 Mr. Rice put out Street Scene, which treats the urban proletariat, but this time with hope. Unlike Mr. Zero, the workers in this play are capable of resolute choice and action.

Another outstanding social play of the twenties was John Howard Lawson's Processional, 1925. Called "A Jazz Symphony of American Life," it pictures the class struggle in a violent coal-fields strike which ends disastrously for the workers. In 1928 The International was produced, in which Mr. Lauson depicts a future world revolt by Communists. This represents a definite stand by Mr. Lauson, unlike the possible defeatism of his earlier Processional.

The International was the offspring of an institution which begot other radical plays during its short-lived career. The New Playwrights, of which Mr. Lauson was a member, occupied a little theatre in Greenwich Village, and produced, among others, Emjo Basshe's Earth, 1927, and John Dos Passos' The Moon is a Gong, 1926, and Airways, Inc., 1929, both radical efforts which pictured facets of oppression in the class war.

Another type of play dealt with specific social problems or injustices of the time. The Sacco-Vanzetti affair produced Maxwell Anderson's and Harold Hickerson's Gods of

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1. Block, p.216.

the Lightning, a thinly-disguised retelling. This is a play of protest, and ends, with the execution of the two heroes, on a strong note of indignation. The persecution of labour leader, Tom Mooney, resulted in I.J. Golden's equally indignant Precedent.

John Wexley produced the Last Mile, 1930, a slashing attack against prisons, frameups, and the conditions which cause men to be criminals, and Steel, 1931, both dealing with contemporary social problems.

Negro discrimination and oppression was another dramatic subject. Eugene O'Neill's All God's Chillun Got Wings was an early effort in this field, followed in 1926 by Paul Green's In Abraham's Bosom, a fierce protest against the oppression of the Negro in the South. Peace does not come to the black-skinned hero's bosom until he is killed by a white mob which is after him for the murder of a white man.

What Price Glory?, 1926, is one of the earliest anti-war plays. It has no heroic soldiers as protagonists, but rather ridicules the horror and filth of war, and the unheroic antics of soldiers.

Accompanying these was the growth of a true worker's drama, which was written, generally, by and about workers. An early workers theatre was founded in 1926 by the

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ubiquitous Michael Gold. His group rehearsed in a loft and produced The Biggest Book in the World on New York's Second Avenue. In 1927 Gold was the prime mover behind the formation of the already-mentioned New Playwrights group.

At the same time amateur radical groups began to spring up. League of Workers Theatres branches blossomed in many of the larger industrial cities, and they performed more often in clubs, halls, on streetcorners, and at factory gates than in theatres. Their plays were short and crude, roughly written and with stylized, melodramatic heroes and villains. These agitprops, as they were called, were violent and occasionally witty. Among these groups perhaps the most popular was The Workers Laboratory Theatre, (the WLT), with the German-speaking Proletbuehne not far behind.

In 1933 the Theatre Union was founded, America's first professional worker's theatre. Its opening production was Peace On Earth. Among the plays it presented, mostly realistic rather than expressionistic in the New Playwright's style, were Peter Martin's Daughter and Phillip Stevenson's God's in His Heaven. It ceased functioning in 1937, after a short but exciting existence.

In 1935 the League of Workers Theatres reorganized itself into the New Theatre League, and the WLT became the Theatre of Action, with a "permanent" company in a "collective apartment." These ventures, however, petered out as their

financial difficulties became insoluble, as did the Theatre Union, after sustaining itself for a few seasons on such plays as Peace on Earth by George Sklar and Albert Maltz, Stevedore, a relative success by Paul Peters and George Sklar, Sailors of Cattaro, an import by Fredrich Wolf, and Black Pit, by Albert Maltz.

Even before the full flowering of Odets, then, Proletarian Literature in the United States could announce, with perhaps more wish than reality, "What this means is that the theatre will cease to be a toy for the rich, a business for real estate dealers, or a racket for ticket speculators. It means that the theatre will become what in its great days it always was; a school, a forum, a communal institution, a weapon in the hands of the masses for fashioning a sound society."[1]

It becomes difficult to speak of drama in this period (1933-1937) without making reference to plays which are not "proletarian" in the strictest sense, but which are nevertheless social criticism and protest.

Elmer Rice appeared once again with We the People, 1933, a vident catalogue of all the social evils which Mr. Rice could call to mind. Unlike The Adding Machine, it ends on an

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1. Proletarian Literature, p. 264.

affirmative note in which the audience is urged to action. This is a predominant feature of many radical plays after the 1929 crash - pessimism and a careful detailing of a hopeless status quo turns to rage and then a call for action.

Judgment Day, 1934, is another of Mr. Rice's contributions, and is a fantasy centered on the Berlin Reichstag fire trial of the early 1930's. The effort moved quickly but lacked a melodramatic punch.

The Negro problem continued to be treated in the 30's, with the two outstanding plays in this genre being John Wexley's They Shall Not Die and Paul Peters' and George Sklar's Stevedore.

They Shall Not Die is based on the famed Scottsboro Negro rape trial, in which nine negro boys were framed on a false case of rape. The Southern Solicitor and Deputy Sheriff attempt to convict the boys, while a radical labor group, which wishes to unite black and white in a common cause, comes to their defense. Even in the face of a confession of perjury by one of the State's main witnesses, the boys are convicted and the play ends with an appeal to the audience. Whatever its defects, They Shall Not Die did have some effect in saving the lives of the real-life Negroes.

Stevedore attacks a different problem. It does not seek sensation through reference to a cause célebre, but pictures the conversion of a group of Negroes from apathy to united, anti-capitalist action. It denounces white capitalist exploitation of Southern Negroes, and urges black and white to unite in a common cause. Lonnie Thompson, the truculent,

freedom-seeking Negro hero, is killed at the end of the play, but just as a capitalist-paid mob is about to storm the Negro barricades, a group of white union men arrive in the nick of time throwing bricks and in general exhibiting a most exemplary "solidarity."

Let Freedom Ring, a play by Albert Bein adapted from Grace Lumpkin's novel To Make My Bread, is likewise set in the South, but pictures the conversion of white workers, submerged in the South's "feudal industrialism,"[1] until they are aroused enough to partake in a labor battle. The play was forced to close after two weeks on Broadway, but the Theatre Union took it over and played to responsive audiences for ten weeks followed by an eight-week tour.

Another popular type in the 1930's was anti-war drama.

What Price Glory?, Maxwell Anderson's and George Stallings' 1924 success, has already been mentioned. In Europe, two differing examples appeared. R.C. Sherriff's Journey's End, 1929, is not a true anti-war play in that it glorifies its heroes in a tradition going back to the dramas of ancient Greece. Wings Over Europe, 1928, by Robert Nichols and Maurice Brown, preaches a world peace based on super-nationalistic and-religious standards.

In 1931, the Theatre Guild presented Hans Chlumberg's Miracle at Verdun, which denounces both war and a society whose peace breeds only war. Two years later Somerset Maugham's

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1. Block, p. 276.

For Services Rendered dealt with the never-ending destructive affects of war on an English family.

An American production was the Reverend John Haynes Holmes' play If This Be Treason, produced by the Theatre Guild in 1935. It attempts to portray the will to peace of two hostile peoples averting war between them. Haynes sees the will-to-peace as a dynamic, constructive force for good in the world, and his play is a wishful portrayal of its hoped-for power.

Another German import was Fredrich Wolf's Sailors of Cattaro, which also deals with the little man's will-to peace, this time as it manifests itself among sailors who decide to end a war by revolting. In the end their human weaknesses betray them into not utilizing an advantage, but the play yet holds hope for the noble good which a properly-used will-to-peace may bring.

Johnny Johnson, which the Group Theatre produced in 1936, is Paul Green's humorous lament about a world going toward war. An indifferent success, it played 9 weeks on Broadway.

The two outstanding American anti-war efforts, however, are George Sklar and Albert Maltz's Peace on Earth and Irwin Shaw's Bury the Dead.

Peace on Earth is a poorly-written play, a "simple didactic fable," but it is noteworthy in that it is perhaps the most leftist of all the anti-war plays in that it carefully outlines the economic causes of war.

A liberal Professor at a New England college discovers, behind the seemingly peaceful American scene, a profit war resulting in industrial conflict at home and world conflict abroad. In trying to tell the truth, in refusing to compromise his ideals, he martyrs himself for the cause of world peace. He is put out of the way by the munitions-makers and international financiers when he threatens their profits, but his death serves only to arouse a mob of workers, who chant "Fight with us, Fight against War;", as the Professor is led to his death.

Bury the Dead, 1936, a long one-act play, presents its message in an unusual way. It is perhaps the best, and certainly the most successful, anti-war play of the 1930's.

A plea by the little who have to fight wars others make, and who are the only ones to suffer, it portrays six dead soldiers who refuse to be buried. Their refusal causes consternation and embarassment all over the country, for both high and low. The soldiers will not lie down because they feel they have been sold out, and they wish to make this known to all the nations. When all else fails, a General orders a machine-gun unit to cut them down. The corpses move offstage in defiance of the General, and the men of the machine gun unit follow, symbolizing a mass inclination towards peace.

Bury the Dead, like Peace on Earth, hits out not only at war but at the causes of war, although perhaps it does not stress the latter as vehemently.

Other plays appeared which described or satirized the situation of the nation or the government. Claire and Paul Sifton's 1931 - was a bitter record of Depression America as manifested in the lives of little people. Presented by the Group Theatre, it did not achieve outstanding success financially or artistically, but was an early example of realistic social criticism. At the same time Albert Maltz's and George Sklar's Merry-Go-Round, 1931, fiercely satirized the corruption of government and its consequences to the people, and Maxwell Anderson appeared in 1933 with Both Your Houses, a merciless picture of Governmental corruption which implies with conviction that honesty is impossible in the American political set-up.

Labor plays also constitute a large segment of proletarian drama. In 1935 Albert Maltz's Private Hicks was presented. As with his concurrent play Black Pit, he deals with a strike. Whereas Black Pit concerns itself with a mining strike, Private Hicks records the experiences of a National Guardsman who refuses to fire on strikers in a stamping mill altercation. Hicks is put away for court-martial, but his actions are presumably supposed to set an example for others in whom the will-for-peace can overcome personal fear.

A strike also forms the background to Marc Blitzstein's The Cradle Will Rock, a musical tour de force of 1937. Blitzstein's story, that of wicked capitalism using violence

and power to fight unions and break strikes, is familiar and hackneyed. The play, however, is not seriously didactical. It is a musical satire, and makes its points wittingly and entertainingly. It has an explosive climax which is the usual call to arms, but its message is delivered in a sugar-coated, easily-digested package.

A second amusing musical, equally leftist if not more so, was Pins and Needles, 1937, presented by the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union. This gay and intelligent show had an amazingly long run in New York, much longer than most of its more serious contemporaries. As class-conscious as any proletarian effort, Pins and Needles managed to put across its message effectively through its barbed wit and unspoiled enthusiasm.

Other social plays include W.H. Auden's and Christopher Isherwood's Dog Beneath the Skin, 1935, a comprehensive social satire of capitalism, and Sidney Kingsley's Dead End, 1936, which followed in the tracks of such plays as 1931 - by depicting the dreadful conditions of Depression life in large cities, and the way in which such conditions fostered gangsterism. The play's message is twofold: slums must go, as they are the breeding-grounds of crime and violence, and those forces which caused slums must be prevented from acting any further.

Paul Green's Hymn to the Rising Sun attacks somewhat the same problem. In an indictment of prison conditions manifested in the gross cruelties of a chain gang, Green implies that young offenders sent to these institutions emerge

more hardened and anti-social then before they were incarcerated. Other social plays of the period include Plant In the Sun, 1937, by Ben Bengal, a gusty and humorous account of a sit-down strike at a candy factory, and This Earth is Ours, by William Kozlenko, Give All Thy Terrors to the Wind, 1936, by Claire & Paul Sifton, and Running Dogs, 1938, by John Wexley.

Mention must also be made of several plays critizing society which were the products of men not decidedly leftist in politics, but whose social condemnation yet allies them with the leftist proletarian literature. Erskine Caldwell's Tabacco Road and John Steinbeck's Of Mice and Men both indict an economic system which allows men to live in poverty or lack opportunity for advancement, and both picture the degrading actions to which such lives descend.

Irwin Shaw's The Gentle People, produced by the Group Theatre in 1939, was more a drama of non-violence than of social criticism. It tells of two men who kill a petty racketeer when he attempts to coërce them into doing his will. The theme, that the meek must at some point stand up and defeat the bullies if they are ever to inherit the earth, can and must be related to the general run of radical plays, which depict the little man turning against capitalist authority in order to have peace, which those in authority do not want.

John Howard Lawson was one of the foremost radical playwrights of the 30's. Following after Processional, 1926,

and The International, he produced Success Story, 1932, which pictures the corruption of a radical East Side Jew into a ruthless capitalist head of a corporation. In 1934 there followed the Pure in Heart and Gentlewoman. The first is a rather sentimental old-school drama, while the second proposes that modern man can only find salvation by participating with the workers in the class struggle. A young radical influences a spoiled, neurotic upper-class "gentlewoman" until she at last adopts his leftist views. Marching Song, 1937, is a revolutionary pep-talk, far dissociated from the uncertainties in ideology found in Processional. In Marching Song Mr. Lawson showed his swing to the left had been more-or-less complete. All spiritual ills are economically caused, he implies. The Theatre Union produced this play, the last of its short career, in 1937.

Gentlewoman was a failure on Broadway, and Lawson was bitter. In an attempt to gain closer contact with workers, Lawson covered the Scottsboro case for a Left paper and was arrested. After a profitable sojourn in Hollywood, Lawson returned seeking "ideological clarity." Marching Song was then the product of a more rigid mind.

Two notable institutions also contributed to the spread of proletarian drama at that time. The first was the Federal Theatre Project, an attempt by the New Deal to aid the development of the dramatic arts. Out of it grew a relatively new theatrical form, the "Living Newspaper," the most successful of which were Power, 1937, and One-Third of a Nation, 1938.

The Living Newspapers were a fresh and direct form of journalistic theatre; they employed, among other devices, the offstage voice, snatches of movie film, audience plants and different levels of abstraction. Inspired by Arthur Arent, author, and Phillip Barber, producer, they dramatized current events, and presented the facts and opinions with simplicity and conviction. Joseph Wood Krutch calls them "by far the most successful effort to use the stage for the purpose of propaganda made .... during this generation,"[1] and John Mason Brown: "one of the most telling propagandist offerings our stage has produced."[2]

The second institution is the Group Theatre. Formed in 1931 by Harold Clurman, Lee Strasburg and Cheryl Crawford, it lasted for 10 years on Broadway. During this time, with a permanent company but no theatre of its own, it presented many dramas of a radical or controversial nature, and toured abroad and at home in addition to presenting full seasons of productions in New York.

While several of the Group company did join the Communist party or considered themselves at last fellow-travellers, the Group itself was not militantly revolutionary. Its productions were usually critical of society, but this does not always imply Communism. The Group's acting was generally of a high calibre, and it disbanded in 1941 when, as Harold Clurman puts it, both the Group ideology and the situation which gave rise to it, changed.

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1. Joseph Wood Krutch, The American Drama Since 1918, (New York, 1939) p. 281.

2. John Mason Brown, Two On The Aisle, (New York, 1938) p. 223.

A phenomenon in the commercial theatre, the Group is still influential in American drama. Among its dedicated band were such notables as Harold Clurman, now a director on Broadway, Lee Strasberg, Elia Kazan, Luther and Stella Adler, Kermit Bloomgarden, who produced both Look Homeward, Angel, and The Music Man during the Broadway season of 1957-58, Julius (John) Garfield, Lee J. Cobb and Franchot Tone. It presented plays by Irwin Shaw, John Howard Lawson, and William Saroyan, among others, but the outstanding playwright of the Group and perhaps of all social drama in the 30's, was Clifford Odets.

CHAPTER II

Waiting for Lefty

Waiting for Lefty was Odets' first Broadway success.[1] The earliest of the 1935 group, it was presented in New York on Sunday night, January 5, 1935, and proved an instantaneous and

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1. At several points Odets' first four plays - Waiting for Lefty, Till the Day I Die, Awake and Sing and Paradise Lost - will be discussed together as the 1935 group. Such a combination is feasible for several reasons.

   To begin with, each of these plays was first produced on Broadway in 1935. Although they were not written in the same year as well - Awake and Sing was the result of Odets' efforts over the winter of 1932-1933, Paradise Lost was written in 1933-1934, Waiting for Lefty was written in 1934 in three nights for the New Theatre League and Till the Day I Die did not take shape until it was decided Odets needed a companion piece to "Lefty" when the latter was to be presented to a carriage-trade Broadway audience in 1935 - yet they have a unity of mood of urgency; they are similar in their criticism of society and their very Leftist call to action, and they contain among them common details manifested in character, speech and tone, and in the general picture they form when viewed as a group; thus they may with justice be referred to as a group wherever necessary.

startling success. It drew wide acclaim and comment, and catapaulted Odets into the front rank of "Left" dramatists. It is important in that it contains basically all the points which Odets stresses in his later plays, and thus it should prove helpful to study "Lefty" in considerable detail, to see precisely what the points are and how he makes them.

Scene One[1] sets the tone for what follows. It opens on a bare stage, with a gunman lolling against the proscenium. Harry Fatt, a greasy and corpulent union official, is trying to dissuade the men from striking. Step by step Odets colors his picture in startling blacks and whites, with little grey discernible: the appropriately named Fatt is interrupted jeeringly and the gunman grows angry. The implication - that those in power (Fatt) are evil and will use force to keep down the masses - is unavoidable, and will be repeated with variations throughout the play.

Someone challenges Fatt, who immediately retorts:

> Fatt: Stand up and show yourself, you damn red! Be a man, let's see what you look like! (Waits in vain). Yellow from the word go! Red and yellow makes a dirty color, boys.
>
> (WL,1,i/5-6)

Immediately a connection is made for the audience: the bosses are evil, and they are anti-red; consequently, those in the masses, the powerless ones (the audience), and those who fight for the masses are red; therefore red equals

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1. Waiting for Lefty contains an opening scene, followed by five Episodes, followed by a closing scene. For purposes of this paper Episode One has become Scene Two, Episode Two is Scene Three, etc., so that Waiting for Lefty will be now discussed as if it were composed of seven Scenes.

good and the anti-reds are bad.

To get across this message, Odets has constructed a drama which is little more than a bag of tricks, but successful ones which make his points strikingly. His first method is that of visual contrast: Fatt is fat, i.e., well-fed, in contrast to everyone else on the stage save the gunman. When a downtrodden cabbie named Joe, the first speaker from the rank-and-file and protagonist of the next scene, moves to center stage, Fatt insolently and infuriatingly blows cigar smoke into the lighted playing area, this action being the visual manifestation of the evil oppressing the masses. Sympathy by the audience for the union men increases - or should increase - directly as the resistance and hostility of Fatt and his gunman. This device - the introduction of a speaker violently in order to gain sympathy for him and his beliefs from the audience - is used more than once by Odets. The second method is spiritual contrast, achieved directly through speech or indirectly through implication. When Fatt maligns the "reds," they become good by implication. When Fatt is supported by the gunman, the representative of ruthless power, Fatt is thereby evil. In such ways Odets orders his audience to know who is on what side, and to which party justice belongs.

In addition to setting up contrasts, Odets must carefully define each side, and to do this he employs further devices, the most obvious being the blunt statement of fact. In the first flashback scene, between the hackie Joe and his wife

Edna, the warring sides are defined. Edna has been furiously berating Joe for their economic plight. She threatens to leave him for an old boyfriend of hers, Bud Haas. Joe retorts:

> Joe: This is what I slaved for!
> Edna: Tell it to your boss!
> Joe: He don't give a damn for you or me!
> Edna: That's what I say.
> Joe: Don't change the subject!
> Edna: This is the subject, the exact subject!. Your boss makes this subject. I never saw him in my life, but he's putting ideas in my head a mile a minute...This is the subject every inch of the way!
> (WL I, ii/12)

The bosses, therefore, are evil; how evil, Odets proceeds to detail through the use of another device - the sudden expansion from the particular to the general.

> Joe: You don't know a-b-c, Edna.
> Edna: I know this - your boss is making suckers outa you boys every minute. Yes, and suckers out of all the wives and the poor innocent kids who'll grow up with crooked spines and sick bones....They look like little ghosts. Betty never saw a grapefruit. I took her to the store just last week and she pointed to a stack of grapefruits. "What's that!" she said. My God, Joe - the world is supposed to be for all of us.
> (WL I, ii/10)

The bosses"don't give a damn" for the common man. Out of this arise all the evils the bosses are guilty of - persecution, mass killing, strangulation of love and happiness, favoritism, poverty, sickness and the decline of morality resulting in post-marital affairs.

> Edna: ...He's [the boss is] giving your kids that fancy disease called the rickets. He's making a jelly-fish outa you and putting wrinkles in my face...He's throwing me into Bud Haas' lap. When in hell will you get wise ---
>
> (WL I, ii/12)

This is the battleground, and on it is fought the economic struggle between the rich and the poor, between the poor and destitution; this is The War which underlies all of Odets' Group Theatre plays.

Odets, however, does not simply indict the situation; he goes on to offer a suggestion as to how it can be improved, and uses different artifices to get this message across as forcefully as he can. One method is to insert the suggestion at the emotional high-point of a longish speech. In this scene Edna berates Joe and he moans:

> Joe: Jeez, I wish I was a kid again and didn't have to think about the next minute.
>
> Edna: But you're not a kid and you do have to think about the next minute. You got two blondie kids sleeping in the next room. They need food and clothes.[1] I'm not mentioning anything else - But we're stalled like a flivver in the snow. For five years I laid awake at night listening to my heart pound. For God's sake, do something, Joe, get wise. Maybe get your buddies together, maybe go on strike for better money...
>
> (WL I, ii/9)

In this way Odets makes it seem as if the suggestion flows inevitably from the preceeding facts. This is repeated in almost every scene - after an emotional and biased presentation of a situation, the call to action is introduced at the

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1. For elaboration, see Samuel Stouffer, Family in the Depression, (New York, 1937).

psychological highpoint of intensity, carrying the audience along on a flow of unreasoned emotional response.

Joe, however, is not yet ready to "get wise;" he must be carried from apathy to enthusiasm. Here, as in most of the other scenes, this is brought about by the occurrence of a last straw; in this case it is Edna's goading and rhapsodizing.

> Edna: ...When in hell will you get wise ---
> Joe: I'm not so dumb as you think! But you are talking like a red.
> Edna: I don't know what that means. But when a man knocks you down you get up and kiss hiss fist! You gutless piece of baloney.
> Joe: One man can't -
> Edna: (with great joy) I don't say one man! I say a hundred, a thousand, a whole million, I say. But start in your own union. Get those hackboys together! Sweep out those rackateers like a pile of dirt! Stand up like men and fight for the crying kids and wives. Goddamnit!. I'm tired of slavery and sleepless nights.
> Joe: (with her): Sure, sure!...
> Edna: Yes. Get brass toes on your shoes and know where to kick!
>
> (WL I, ii/13)

"Know where to kick!" - a direct and violent exhortation. Odets' devices are employed primarily to shock. Everything is stated, every scene is played in violent, unthinking terms, quickly and overwhelmingly. This hasty and explosive movement leaves little time for thought. It draws the spectator along by setting up startling contrasts presented in brief, exhilarating, rabble-rousing speeches. The sympathetic and the unthinking are swept along ecstatically, while the reasonable may balk at the technique as well as the gist of this drama.

This is the pattern which most of the succeeding scenes follow - a statement of the situation and its causes, then a positive decision arrived at through the action of a final catalyst. The total play structure follows a similar pattern.

Scene Two, the Lab Assistant Episode, presents The War in industry. Young Miller, an essentially decent and virtuous chemist, is asked by his tactless and ruthless boss, Fayette, to spy on another scientist while both work on the preparation of poison gas. The boss defines his character in a few pithy sentences:

> Fay: I like sobriety in my workers... the trained ones, I mean. The pollacks and niggers, they're better drunk - keeps them out of mischief.
>
> (WL I, iii/14)

Later, talking of war, Miller says:

> Mill (addressing his pencil): They say twelve million men were killed in the last one and 20 million more wounded or missing.
> Fay: That's not our worry. If big business went sentimental over human life there wouldn't be big business of any sort!
> Mill: My brother and two cousins went in the last one.
> Fay: They died in a good cause.
>
> (WL, I, iii/15)

At this point the audience is presumably supposed to wonder for whom the cause was good, and visually the answer is not difficult to arrive at, as Odets constrasts Miller, the small and virtuous wage-earner, with the rich,

smug and evil Fayette. When Miller refuses both to work on poison gas and to spy on his superior, he is fired - the rich will tolerate no deviants from their line - and this refusal becomes the sudden call to action.

> Fay: It's up to you.
> Mill: My mind's made up.
> Fay: No hard feelings?
> Mill: Sure hard feelings! I'm not the civilized type, Mr. Fayette. Nothing suave or sophisticated about me. Plenty of hard feelings! Enough to want to bust you and all your kind square in the mouth! (Does exactly that).
>
> (WL,I,iii/17)

Again, Odets is playing with the audience's emotions. He makes connections which have no logical basis, but which a 1935 audience would undoubtedly have accepted because their temper had been raised. Miller leaps from the particular to the general - "you and all your kind" - suddenly and illogically, but this comes at a moment of high anxiety which has been built up to quickly and with great force. Fayette is big business, and his name does not accidentally bear a resemblance to Fatt: therefore the audience is meant to identify him with the cruel taxi-owners and all the robbing rich portrayed or spoken of in the successive scenes of this play, and consequently Miller's hitting him is for the audience a psychological release from a point of tension.

It must be further noted that the call to action in this play is always of a physical nature; when Fayette is identified with "the rich," the characteristics of civility

and suavity and sophistication which Miller declaims are thereby attached to Fayette. Miller, by default, becomes uncivil and uncouth and crude - the characteristics required for one who would act quickly and destructively. Odets, therefore, is not calling for a reform of society but a revolution against it. His War is to be all-out, unmericful.

Scene Three, the Young Hack and His Girl, is love seen economically. Florence is talking to her brother Irv:

> Flor: ...Why don't we send Mom to a hospital? She can die in peace there instead of looking at the clock on the mantlepiece all day.
> Irv: That needs money. Which we don't have!
> Flor: Money, Money, Money!
> Irv: Don't change the subject!
> Flor: This is the subject!
>
> (WL,I, iv/18)

Florence is warned by Irv not to see her boyfriend Sid, a presumably perpetually poor hack. When Sid arrives, he and Florrie get down to the playwright's business.

> Sid: ...Christ, Baby! I get like thunder in my chest when we're together. If we went off together I could maybe look the world straight in the face, spit in its eye like a man should do...
> Flor: But something wants us to be lonely like that - crawling alone in the dark. Or they want us trapped.
> Sid: Sure, the big shot money men want us like that.
>
> (WL,I, iv/20)

This scene attempts to prove, among other things, that in a capitalistic society love cannot flourish without money, money being the prime requisite of the ability to

pursue happiness. Struggling wage-earners do not have the time for love - a theme repeated in Rocket To the Moon --and therefore the exonomic plight, caused by the evil rich, prevents the poor from being happy, from fully enjoying love, which should be free to all men.

Sid, in this scene, does not follow the pattern set by protagonists in the earlier scenes. He speaks of something like revolt -

> Sid: ...They know if they give in just an inch, all the dogs will be down on them together - an ocean knocking them to hell and back...
> (WL, I, iv/20)

- but the only seemingly positive step he takes is to renounce Florrie, which is not positive at all; rather , it is an admission and an acceptance of defeat. The two lovers pathetically decide they cannot marry because their-unavoidable? - poverty will ruin any chance for, or semblance of, happiness, and they part to face a heartbroken and loveless future.

Why does this scene not end on a triumphant note? Because it is pathetic rather than violent? Because Odets, perhaps for at least this one moment, was sincere enough a dramatist to be unwilling to pervert this scene to his directly hortatory ends? - It is difficult to ascribe one reason alone. Perhaps Odets felt that the pity of this situation had made his point with sufficient force that he need not have Sid suddenly galvanized into action, as one would have expected.

Scene Four is the Labor Spy Episode, dealing with the effects of money-lust on human morality. Clayton, introduced benignly by the malevolent Fatt so the audience will have no trouble discerning on whose side his loyalty lies, claims to be a striker from Philadelphia and attempts to disuase the men from striking, which, it must be remembered, is what Fatt himself was trying to do at the outset of this play. As Clayton speaks, he is interrupted and insulted by members of the audience, which further establishes his unity with the oppressors. This device - plants an action in the audience - is repeated with devastating effect at the end of the play.

Someone from the audience attempts to get on stage and is resisted by Fatt; thus, when he finally mounts the boards, the audience is presumably violently on his side. He is infuriated:

> Voice: Where the hell did you pick that name! Clayton! This rat's name is Clancy.... Fruit! I almost wet myself listening to that one!
> (WL, I, v/24)

It is this man's contention that Clayton (Clancy?) is a company spy.

> Voice: Right now he's working for that Bergman outfit on Columbus Circle who furnishes rats for any outfit in the country, before, during, and after strikes.
> (WL, I, v/24)

Clayton, however, maintains his innocence until

> Voice: ...Boys, do you know who this sonovabitch is?
> Clayton: I never seen you before in my life!!
> Voice: Boys, I slept with him in the same bed sixteen years, HE'S MY OWN LOUSY BROTHER!!
> (WL, I, v/24-25)

The implication here, of course, is that the company - ownership - is dirty, and will use any dirty methods to gain its ends. More, the scene shows what horrible things money - or the lack of it - can do to men or make them do. Clayton - the company spy - is a terrible perversion of human nature, a worker who seeks to betray his own brother and other workers. The rank-and-file, of course, are unbesmirched, pure, decent and sincere, wanting only an honest break. Here, as in all the scenes, those who are good are very very good, and those who are bad are horrid.

Scene Five is the Interne Episode, or the War in Science and the Healing Arts. Young Dr. Benjamin, Jewish and brilliant, discovers from old Dr. Barnes that he has been replaced for a particular operation.

> Benj: ...I don't mind being replaced, Doctor, but Leeds [his replacement] is a damn fool!. He shouldn't be permitted -
> Barnes dryily): Leeds is the nephew of Senator Leeds.
> (WL, I, vi/25)

The conflict is again unmistakeable. Leeds is powerfully-backed, incompetent and bad; Benjamin has no support, is persecuted and is good; therefore, by the audience, he is emotionally associated with the oppressed taxi-drivers. His father is intelligent, (presumably Senator Leeds is not), and had scraped together his "pitiful" savings to educate his son, now apparently in vain.

Having set up the contending sides, Odets proceeds to elaborate on the evil of the bad one. The hospital is <u>closing another</u> charity ward, and it will have to cut down on staff.

Benjamin is top man, has worked hard and shown the greatest promise.

Benj: But in this case?
Barnes: Complications. (WL, I, vi/27)

Benjamin is to be fired. Once more Odets resorts to stating his case in so many words:

Benj: Such discrimination, with all those wealthy brother Jews on the board?

Barnes: I've remarked before - doesn't seem to be much difference between wealthy Jews and rich Gentiles. Cut from the same piece!
(WL, I, vi/27)

The "last straw" in this scene is the news that Leeds has lost Benjamin's patient on the operating table. Two or three devices serve to bring the scene to an end.

When Benjamin receives the news of Leeds' failure he stands shocked and then dashes his rubber gloves to the floor. In a poor example of the old generation urging on the new, Barnes incites Benjamin to action:

Barnes: That's right...that's right. Young, hot, go and do it! I'm very ancient, fossil, but life's ahead of you, Dr. Benjamin, and when you fire that fist shot say, "This one's for old Doc Barnes!"...
(WL, I, vi/28)

There follow immediately the juxtaposition of certain key words so as to have them associated in the audience's minds. The first instance is that of "radical" and "certainty."

Benj: Lots of things I wasn't certain of. Many things these radicals say...you don't believe theories until they happen to you.

Then "right" and "belief" and "change" are connected with Russia.

> Barnes: You lost a lot today, but you won a great point.
> Benj: Yes, to know I'm right? To really begin believing in something? Not to say, "What a world!", but to say, "Change the world!" I wanted to go to Russia.
> (WL, I, vi/28)

Such an abstract solution as Russia, however, would be wholly incongruous in this play, and Odets seems to have been aware of it, for Benjamin then decides to remain at home - "maybe drive a cab" - and fight.

With this he becomes a rebel, one of the succession beginning with the taxi-drivers. He too jumps from the particular by generalizing his situation without reason:

> Benj: ...Our[1] work's here--America!
> (WL, I, vi/29)

and later

> Benj: Fight! Maybe get killed, but goddamn! We'll go ahead![2]

By employing similar devices in each scene, and by setting up the same contrasts, Odets induces the same reactions and conclusions from the audience continually, and this in itself is a trick too, for, by repeating his themes forcefully and frequently enough, he hopes to gain for them an acceptance arising out of little more than familiarity, the constant confrontation by a strongly voiced opinion.

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1. Underlining mine.
2. Underlining mine.

The final scene, reverting to the original bare stage, has a twofold existence. It is, on the one hand, a complete scene in itself, but it is also, on the other hand, the final section of the drama as an entity. It stands in relation to the whole drama as the final moments of each scene do to each scene. The general pattern of the play follows the internal pattern of each scene, and this last scene contains the final "last straw" and the final call to action. The hero is the audience - the rank-and-file cabbies, while the spurring agent is Agate Keller.

As the scene opens he is haranguing the audience. Odets attempts to gain sympathy for Keller by visual and spiritual contrast, by having Keller make a few jokes at Fatt's and the union's expense which elicit patent demonstrations of dislike from its objects, and by having Keller actually manhandled by the two bullies, so that he continues speaking with his shirt torn. He states the problem baldly:

> Agate: Don't laugh! Nothing's funny! This is your life and mine! Its skull and bones every incha the road! Christ, we're dyin' by inches!.... Joe said it. Slow death or fight. Its war!...Working class, unite and fight!. Tear down the slaughter houses of our old lives! Let freedom really ring.
> (WL, I, vii/30)

And so class war is again proposed as the only solution:

> Agate: ...These sick slobs stand here telling us about bogeymen. That's a new one for the kids - the reds is bogeymen!. But the man who got me food in 1932, he called me Comrade! The one who picked me up where I bled - he called me Comrade too! What are we waiting for...Don't wait for Lefty!
> (WL, I, vii/31)

But, like Joe, like Miller, like Benjamin, the audience as hero is not yet ready to move, and so Odets introduces the last straw. In a master stroke, someone rushes down the aisle with the news that Lefty has been found "behind the car barns with a bullet in his head!" Agate erupts into a final emotional appeal which quickly becomes general and draws sympathy by talk of martyrdom before demanding an answer from the audience:

> Agate (crying): Hear it, boys, hear it? hell, listen to me! Coast to coast! HELLO AMERICA! HELLO. WE'RE STORMBIRDS OF THE WORKING CLASS. WORKERS OF THE WORLD..... OUR BONES AND BLOOD! And when we die they'll know what we did to make a new world! Christ, cut us up to little pieces. We'll die for what is right! put fruit trees where our ashes are!
> (to audience): Well, what's the answer?
> ALL: STRIKE!
> Agate: LOUDER!
> ALL: STRIKE!
> Agate and Others on Stage: AGAIN!
> ALL: STRIKE, STRIKE, STRIKE!!!
>
> Curtain
>
> (WL, I, vii/31)

In this final explosion by which the audience releases itself of all its tension and hate, the play ends.

....

Such is Waiting for Lefty. It is perhaps the most practical-minded of the 1935 plays, for, while Till The Day I Die, Awake and Sing, and Paradise Lost are positive in emotion and intent, they do not propose any immediate and practicable solutions as to how best win The War; Waiting for Lefty, on the other hand, has immediacy.

It has something else as well, and this seems to be the secret of its success - its content of rebellion could be applied, especially in 1935, to spheres larger than a taxi-strike. Many of the cabmen, it should be noticed, are hybrids - Miller really wants to be a chemist, and only drives a cab as a stopgap; Benjamin wants to be a doctor; Joe would change his job if another and better one were available. Thus, an idea is implanted in the audience's mind that the taxi-strike itself is merely a stopgap, a symbol, a beginning, and therefore the audience is free to feel that a greater, more inclusive rebellion underlies the spirit of the play. Odets aids this impression. Firstly by the content of the scenes, many of which do not directly concern taxi-drivers at all. Further, Odets switches often from the particular to the general, notably in Agate's final, thundering speech, leading the audience to make the larger associations which he wants.

Thus it would be easy for a 1935 audience to identify itself with the general, abstract spirit of revolt of Waiting for Lefty, for the play, violent, sentimental and illogical, moves through quick emotion: its scenes build up to a point of tension which is relieved - in all but one case - by a fast, emotional decision; its decisions are impulsive, illogically reached; the characters are intensely vibrant, but real in an economic and social sense only; i.e., they are symbolic, and therefore the audience could appreciate and sympathize with their spirit rather than their literal being; therefore, Harold Clurman may be right in saying "Strike!" was Lefty's lyric

message, not alone for a few extra pennies of wages or for shorter hours of work, strike for greater dignity, strike for a bolder humanity, strike for the full stature of man![1]

The themes of the play are not difficult to ascertain. To begin with, one finds the concept of total, irrevocable economic warfare between two clearly-defined, inimical forces. Each scene states and restates this emphatically. Companions with this are the twin concepts of the oppressors and the oppressed, the powerful, evil, cruel rich contrasted with the poor, good, downtrodden masses.

This war, The War, is never-ending and unmerciful, and must be fought to the death. Its cause is capitalism. It must be won by the masses, and only through concerted action will any positive results occur. The masses need a faith, something to believe in and act upon, something constructive to supplement and eventually supplant the destructive urge against society, and this new belief is Communism. No other conclusion can be reached regarding the message of this play, although an objection may be raised that this is too literal an interpretation. If the characters are symbolic, some critics may ask, why not seek a deeper meaning in the new faith as well? The answer is that Communism as a literal fact, when rarified to an abstract concept or inclination, is still Communism. One might idealise and make non-specific Odets' hatred of the existing social and economic situation, and his childishly simple yearning for people to be free of any want or pressure, but it is difficult to idealise an ideal, which is what Communism in America, circa 1935, was.

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1. Harold Clurman, The Fervent Years, (New York, 1957), p.139.

The economic situation, to continue, causes men to do horrible, evil, unnatural things. The rich, in attempting to maintain the status quo with all the ruthless power at their command, are ruining the nation. Many people lack jobs, many have no homes, all are ciphers, wage-earners rather than human beings. The capitalist system is evil and wasteful, and the common man must be given a greater share of wealth and independence, for only then is he free to engage in the pursuit of happiness.

This is the gist of what is to be repeated-- with variations --in all of the other 1935 plays, and implied or stated in every consequent Odets Group Theatre production. The differences among Odets' subsequent plays are in mood, in urgency, in optimism or the lack of it, in the particular definition of the new faith each play propounds; the social commentary, as will be shown, remains the same in each.

CHAPTER 3

Till the Day I Die

Till the Day I Die was first presented in March, 1935, as a companion piece to Waiting for Lefty. It "was suggested by a letter from Germany printed in the New Masses." (TD, index page/106) and fails primarily because Odets was not familiar with his material. He was therefore forced to resort to devices in an attempt to get the message across through shock treatment and blatant appeals to the emotion. "Lefty," was successful because its subject-matter was so topical, and because its stage-tricks worked so well; Awake and Sing succeeded because, among other things, Odets gave his characters a painful, vibrant intensity; this play fails because its subject is not immediate, its characters are not realized and its events are not familiar to the author; therefore they are not made impressive to the audience.

On the surface, the story concerns the battle of the underground Communist resistance against Nazi Germany. Its heroes are the Communists, who have little money but much hope, and are oppressed by a force much greater than themselves. This force is the Nazi party; it is wealthy, powerful and totally unscrupulous.

The characters Odets created to make up both sides of this conflict are illconceived. Of the Communists, there is Tilly- an ideal rather than a real person, alert, hard-working, loving, tender, loyal. Curiously enough for Odets, one learns little of her background, so that there is no idyllic past to be compared to the terrible present.

Such is not the case with the brothers, Carl and Ernst Tausig. Not only are they perfect, but their lives were touchingly beautiful before they began to fight for the Cause. Ernst has been sick, yet, when he is encountered at the beginning of the play, he has been working for thirty consecutive sleepless hours. Carl is conscientious, sympathetic and equally hard-working. He is decent, solicitous of his brother's welfare, altogether an admirable man.

Baum, another of their crew, equally intrepid, resolute and fine, used to be "a peaceful man who planted tulips." (TD,I,i/108) His situation is paralleled by that of the Tausig brothers. Ernst has not "touched a violin for six months." (TD,I,i/108)

The Nazis, on the other hand, are mostly villainous and despicable. The first one meets is Popper, who is hardly more than a caricature - a little, balked, petulant boy. He fawns over his superiors and whines when he has been reprimanded. He is shown to be incredibly stupid and bungling, and his actions are often deliberately clownish.

Working beneath him are two orderlies too stupid to be true; they repeat, parrot-like and without understanding, certain phrases and ejaculations which they hear. They cannot perform adequately even the most menial tasks, and betray few signs of intelligence.

The Nazi troopers are cruel and sadistic. They are presented in melodramatic terms, beating up prisoners and kicking old men. Zeltner, a turncoat Communist who has become an informer, is portrayed by Odets as limping and masked. Odets feels here, as he does so often throughout these plays, that it is necessary to present political and social abberations physically. In this case

Zeltner is not whole spiritually because of his treachery; consequently he limps. On a later occasion, equally unsuccessfully, Odets describes the hero of Golden Boy as cockeyed, this defect being a physical symbol for his warped outlook on life.

None of the Nazis is allowed to escape unblemished. Captain Schlegel, haughty and cruel, presumably an efficient and admirable military machine, is discovered to be a homosexual. Major Duhring, (the only decent Nazi in the play), must have a flaw, and is revealed as a turncoat Communist who is ashamed of himself, shoots Schlegel in a cowardly manner when the latter threatens to reveal Duhring's Jewish background, and then redeems himself by committing a dramatic and symbolic suicide - he removes his military arm-band and tears down the Nazi flag before shooting himself.

The evil Nazis are in power, and do their best to persecute and keep down the Communists. Such is the social structure as Odets portrays it, and out of it he has fashioned what seems to be a cheap melodrama. It is essentially the story of Ernst Tausig, with all the other characters being appendages to him. He is betrayed, arrested, tortured, discredited in the eyes of his former comrades, and finally commits suicide when he fears his will is about to break and he will turn informer.

The play had a double appeal, for it could draw supporters from those who hated Hitler and from those who admired Russia.

On the surface, then, this is an anti-Nazi melodrama with a leftist slant, and does not seem kin to the other plays in the 1935 group. This, however, is simply a surface feature. It is

true that Odets himself may have hated the Nazis and been sympathetic to the Communists; it is equally true that the leftist atmosphere was beneficial to a play's notoriety; it is also true that Odets knew the enthusiasm for Waiting for Lefty was largely the result of the play's communistic overtones, and that he would probably be willing to exploit them again; but Till the Day I Die cannot be conceived as having come from the pen of Odets unless one can relate it to the other plays he wrote, and to the milieu in which he was operating at that time. Odets was writing about the U.S.A.; it was the basic material of all his other plays. Furthermore, he was writing about an economic situation particular to his native land. He saw himself fighting for a particular cause, against a particular enemy, the American economic plight. Therefore, it is far-fetched to assume that he would have written Till the Day I Die did it not conform to his views, further his purpose and reflect the milieu in which he worked. More, the Group Theatre would probably not have produced the play were it simply a topical and sensational rabble-rouser.

Till the Day I Die, therefore, must have symbolic values beyond its literal meaning. On the surface it deals with Nazis and Communists, but each character or force presented, and each action, must be an indirect comment upon something. This "something" can only be the American scene.

The overall picture, to begin with, with its two distinct warring sides, is similar to the situation existing in Odets' other plays.

There are two forces, one the oppressor and the other the oppressed. The former are wealthy, they control the country's riches, they are evil, callous and insensitive, and they will use any and all methods to keep their victims down. This is precisely the description Odets furnishes of the owners, the rich, the capitalists, in the other 1935 plays. Further, there is a direct mention of the economic situation at the beginning of the play:

> Ernst: ...Workers might like to know the American embargo on German goods has increased 50% in the last six months. They might like to know wages are down one-third and vital foods are up seventy-five percent.
> (Td, I, i/107)

The situation is bad and growing worse; therefore, it would seem Odets is saying that Nazi cruelty and oppression are simply results of their earnest wish to prevent the masses from bettering their position at the expense of the Nazis. In this way the Nazis are at one with the "rich" and the "bosses" of Waiting for Lefty and Awake and Sing.

Next, Odets stresses the confusion of the Nazi government. Its hirelings are shown to be ludicrously incompetent, and its routine haphazard and unorganized. Captain Schlegel, the cruel, efficient and proud Nazi who has just smashed Ernest's fingers, ends Scene II in dreadful confusion, not at all confident as one would expect him to be:

> Schlegel (looks at papers, scatters them around): My God! My God! What's the world coming to? Where's it going? My God!
> (Td, I, ii/120)

This is a parallel to Leo Gordon in Paradise Lost, who is of the capitalist class himself, yet does not fully understand the principles of business and is not aware until the end of the play what damage he has done as an owner. There is a stronger parallel in

a later play of Odets', Night Music, where Hollywood, a force which affects the very existence and destiny of one of the characters, a force which abuses and manhandles him and which is, in relation to him, all-powerful, wealthy and insensitively cruel, is shown, in the affair of the monkeys, to be in a state of rididulous, puerile confusion. Odets seems to be saying that the horror of the general situation is in part due to the confusion, and not only the cruelty, of the ruling forces.

Odets' picture of the Nazis, then, is similar in attitude to what he said about the old order of capitalism. With regard to individuals not one of the Nazis is good; all have flaws or gross defects - Captain Schlegel is a secret homosexual; Major Duhring, whose wife is unoriginal and unthinkingly chauvinistic, was once a Communist but changed parties, and now commits suicide as the only way out of his predicament. This is a direct parallel to the problem of Joe Bonaparte in Golden Boy, who attempted to win quick glory in the prize ring rather than earn a meagre living as a violinist, and was corrupted to the point where he was in a world he could not tolerate, but was too far gone to return to the life he had given up, and so committed suicide. Popper is an ass, and his orderlies are sub-human. The Nazi troppers are sheer cruelty personified. Adolph, a Nazi soldier, is a fawning sycophant.

The Nazi system as well functions in a manner similar to capitalism in America. The Nazis, through their oppression, keep the Communists from happiness. Ernst and his wife, Tilly, can have no home life while the struggle goes on, the brothers can no longer play their beloved music, and Baum no longer cultivates his garden.

The struggle against the Nazis has ruined many people. Zeltner has become an informer and Duhring is confused and can only end by committing suicide. The detective who visits Tilly and Ernst is insolent and thrill-seeking. Steiglitz, formerly one of the top Communist philosophers, is now a senile invalid; Schlegel has become a heartless machine, typical of his kind; thus the Nazis are mainly responsible for the physical and mental plight of the Communists as well as of the members of their own sect.

In this way, point by point, with regard to its nature, its members and their actions, the Nazi party becomes a direct and inescapable symbol of capitalism and capitalists.

On their part, the play's heroes, the Communists, are not too different from destitute taxi-drivers or poor Bronx families. They have little money or power, and are oppressed by a force much greater than themselves. They do not want the world, or domination of it; they simply want the opportunity for happiness, a basic freedom from which they have been deprived. They are all noble, decent, loyal and generally wretched. Tilly is directly comparable to Edna in Waiting for Lefty, to Bessie Berger in Awake and Sing, and to Clara Gordon in Paradise Lost. All these women are shrewd, common-sensical, wiser than their men, logical and cold-hearted when the occasion demands. They do not fool when there is business to be done, yet they display signs of great tenderness which must be stifled if they are to survive.

There is only one character who is openly made wretched by what he was forced to do in order to earn money. He is a young boy who, for five marks, rode on a truck distributing illegal literature and was arrested and kicked unconscious for his troubles. This does not mean, however, that the play's course of action is uninfluenced by the economic situation. No specific mention is made of "the big shot money men," or "they," but inherent in the Communist-Nazi struggle are implications which are stated openly in the other plays.

The Communists' fight is for freedom, but this fight is at the moment of an economic nature, since the lack of money is the most pressing and immediate problem to be alleviated. Freedom comes with financial security, and the reverse is likewise true; thus the Communists' search in this play is a restatement of the struggles in the other three. The search here, it must be pointed out, is not for money as an end, nor is it in any other play of the group. Young Dr. Benjamin, in Waiting for Lefty, wants to change the world in order "to be able to work"; (WL, I, vi/28) Ralph Berger, in Awake and Sing, wants to "...fix it so life won't be printed on dollar bills." (AS, III/97) Leo Gordon, in Paradise Lost, carols of a world where "No fruit tree wears a lock and key. Men will sing at their work..." (PL, III/236) and Ernst Tausig, just before he commits suicide, says "...soon all the desolate places of the world must flourish with human genius...a world of security and freedom is waiting for all mankind!" (TD, I, vii/154). In each case money will bring the freedom to pursue happiness.

In view of the fact that the War is already on, (i.e. the masses have already made The Realisation and are now striving to achieve the New World), this play is a hopeful one. Happiness can not only be pursued but attained.

The present situation is dreadful, Ernst (Odets) says: "...I know that till the day I die there is no peace for an honest worker in the whole world." (TD, I, v/139). Undoubtedly, however, it will improve. Before he dies Ernst predicts: "...The day is coming and I'll be in the final result... In that dizzy dazzling structure some part of me is built." (TD, I, vii/153). Ernst follows the general pattern of the other 1935 heroes - he is downtrodden, but out of his misery he sees a sudden gleam of hope for the future, and then takes positive action. Ernst's suicide, therefore, unlike that of Joe Bonaparte's in Golden Boy, and unlike Major Duhring's in this play, is not an admission of defeat; rather, it is a positive and constructive step toward realizing the world of "happy laughing people," and thus Ernst becomes one with the striking taxi-drivers, with Ralph Berger of Awake and Sing, and with Leo Gordon of Paradise Lost.

The "dizzy dazzling structure" which is to be achieved is of course a Communist one. This might seem at first academic, for Ernst is a Communist already, but it must be remembered that this is a symbolic play. The Nazis and the Communists have their counterparts in American life; thus Communism must have its counterpart, but as was explained in Chapter 2,[1] this can only be Communism. Thus the implications as well as the facts lead to a Leftist conclusion. At one point Ernst declares:

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1. See p. 71

> Ernst: My present dream of the world - I ask for happy laughing people everywhere. I ask for hope in eyes: for wonderful baby boys and girls I ask, growing up strong and prepared for a new world. I won't ever forget the first time we visited the nursery in Moscow. Such faces on those children! Future engineers, doctors;
> (TD,I,i/112)

This play, therefore, is one of the 1935 group in mood, tone and message. It pictures a society divided into two clearly defined warring groups, the oppressor and the oppressed. Each member of the former is evil and corrupt, or ludicrous. Each member of the latter is good, pure, honest, loyal and not greedy or desirous of power for its own sake. The oppressors act viciously and insensitively in an attempt to maintain the existing situation and to keep the oppressed down, and the oppressed display signs of the good people they could have been, had they not been forced into this conflict. There is only one answer for the oppressed, one faith, and only when they all realize this and work together is there any chance for an improvement of their situation. Bold and decisive action is required of the heroes if they are to prevent the oppressors from keeping the oppressed subjugated.

In total, therefore, when interpreted in reference to American life, the whole structure and fabric of this play is precisely a restatement, in symbolic form, of situations and attitudes portrayed differently and perhaps more explicitly in the other plays.

CHAPTER 4

Awake and Sing

Awake and Sing is Odets' first full-length play. Written in 1932-33, it did not go into rehearsal until late December of 1934, (ten days before Waiting for Lefty burst upon New York), and was presented in February of 1935. Not an outstanding financial success, it, yet, became the talk of the town and earned Odets widespread notoriety.

As does Waiting for Lefty, this play epitomises the Depression and post-Depression yearning; yearning for something, no matter what; for particulars, such as better wages and steam heat until 12 P.M. rather than 10 P.M.; for more general things things such as greater economic opportunities and more easily accessible education; and, most generally and most vaguely, for a release from the feeling of oppression, the despair of a lack of opportunity, the frustration of lives dimly believed to be half-lived. The spirit of 1932-35, out of which Odets wrote these four plays, was one of want and quest, of frustration and misery, of a desire to ameliorate the situation and never again to return to a way of life which could permit such a situation to arise. Herein lies Awake and Sing's success, for it not only transmitted a mood well, but the mood corresponded to what the people felt. Like Waiting for Lefty, it allowed its audiences to cleanse, refresh and excite themselves by identification with vital and at times earnest characters.

In Waiting for Lefty the war was spoken of and demonstrated through incidents; in Till the Day I Die it was presented in parable; Awake and Sing presents the War in perhaps its most essential form, in the home as it affects a whole family.

The play centers around the Berger family. It has two common features - the lives of its members are determined by money or the lack of it, and they are consequently bitter and frustrated in varying degrees because of this. They all want something, something different from what they have. They are not poor, but are on the edge of poverty, and struggle to attain or maintain middle-class respectability. They all demand, but none of them really understands what the others want; they understand only the common fact of yearning. This lack of understanding results from the different beliefs which they have, and thus they do not achieve much of a positive nature. This is what Odets seems to be indicting in such lives -- that they go nowhere, but remain constantly yearning, because they have not got one concerted and definite aim in mind which can be translated by all into action leading to desirable results.

The father of the family, Myron Berger, is a struggling wage-earner who does not really understand the present and thus hearkens back to the supposedly good old days. The times have confused and beaten him, as they did to many in 1932-1934. To a man who sees the banking system of his country fail,[1] a president helpless to prevent the slow but inexorable spread of a Depression,[2] a new president whose seemingly fresh and bold schemes prove

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1. See p. 8

2. See p. 8

fruitless and frustrating,[3] and a race of businessmen who rush somewhere about above his intellectual grasp deliberately scheming to extract profit at any cost, the "good old times" of an age gone by, when everything seemed in order and had its place and possessed at least the appearance of benevolence, must have seemed like heaven indeed. Myron is bereft of positive values; society has so beaten him that his only refuge is to fall back on an apparently easier, simpler and healthier past. He has been rendered incapable of action, and holds little hope for the future.

Myron's wife, Bessie, basically a loving and tender person, is now shrewish, coolheaded and cold-hearted, logical in all things. Years of schooling in adversity have left her interested only in survival, in the protection of her family and in the maintenance of life.

Her son Ralph is bitter and frustrated. All his life he has been denied the things he wanted because his family lacked money, and so he has become one of a great number of hopeless young men who carry in themselves a great hate for the existing situation, but little knowledge of any way to better themselves. Ralph is desire without purpose.

His sister, Hennie, is a young and attractive girl caught in a trap of poverty from which she yearns to break free. Intelligent and imaginative, she is bored by her dull existence, tries to set up barriers so that it will not intrude on her too constantly, but cannot manage to escape from it other than in ill-conceived bursts and flashes.

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3. See p. 9

Jacob, the grandfather, personifies thought divorced from action. He is keenly aware of the ills of society, but does nothing to abolish or change them. He offers comments periodically and ineffectually, but remains generally unheard or unacknowledged. He is Odets' mouthpiece, the Communist standard.

Uncle Morty, Bessie's brother, is a bachelor capitalist, rich and presumably greasy, who exploits his workers because it is the only way he has seen success achieved. He exhibits the traits of his kind and acts in accordance with expediency.

Sam Feinschreiber, a friend of the family, is a lonely, homeless and oversensitive man. He has been conditioned by a consistent lack of personal eminence or financial success, so that life is to him an enemy which mocks and defeats him, and thus he is continually seeking something beautiful and stable which will not mock him, and in which he can believe.

Moe Axelrod, a boarder in the Berger home, is a tough-one-legged war veteran turned racketeer. He breaks the law because it is the only way he knows to succeed in modern society. He tries never to show his feelings or to be accountable to anyone. Success through violence has left him hard, cynical and unsmiling. What ever goodness he may have possessed has been gradually crushed out of him by the type of life he leads and the actions by which he has chosen to "earn" his daily bread. He makes his way alone and scorns those who cannot; but he is not satisfied. He is always tormented by a sense of unfullfilment.

All these people exist in a context of antagonism. They

are could-have-beens who labor under a tension and a frustration which have an economic basis, and this constitutes the prime feature of their lives.

In Act 1 Hennie is discovered to be pregnant. Moe loves her but cannot bring himself to marry her, so she is pawned off by Bessie on the dog-like, loving Sam. Jacob disapproves, and vows to save Ralph from such a family, i.e., from capitalist society and what it causes people to do.

Ralph is in love with a sickly orphan girl living in the care of relatives. Bessie will not let him marry her, and she is finally sent away by an uncle who does not look favorably upon Ralph's suit.

A spiteful remark by Hennie to Sam reveals to Ralph the truth about his sister's marriage, and this is the beginning of his awakening. When Bessie insults Jacob greatly, Jacob commits suicide, leaving Ralph $3000.00 insurance money. Moe finally convinces Hennie, whom, one learns, he himself had made pregnant earlier, to abandon Sam and go with him, "where its moonlight and roses," (AS,LLI/98) and Ralph, now no longer despondent or bitter, urges them on after having decided to set out upon his own path to enlightenment.

Myron and Bessie do not learn anything, they simply continue to suffer and endure. The action of the play serves to confirm for them only the inevitability of suffering. Old Jacob has apparently "learned" in the Odetsian sense long ago, but has done nothing about it, which is to Odets tantamount to not learning at all. Jacob "had

golden opportunities but drank instead a glass tea," (AS, II, 11/78) and remains now simply the instrument speaking the revolutionary theme in Odets' symphony, and becomes the device whereby Ralph is made to feel the revolutionary fervor himself.

Neither does Hennie learn; she escapes, but this is not the same thing. In a society of inconstant and undefined values, when people are made desperate because they cannot control the oppressive circumstances they are in, some may attempt to circumvent their problems, rather than, as one supposes Odets would have them do, conquer them. Moe beat the War by becoming a lawbreaker, and he persuades Hennie to do the same. She owes herself happiness, he argues, and he can give it to her; therefore, she has no reason to remain behind, tied to a husband and a life she despises. Hennie goes.

Uncle Morty does not change, for he is too adamant in his acceptance of capitalism; neither does Sam, for he lacks the personal initiative to do anything but suffer; yet Odets must show <u>someone</u> of the family making the great realisation that there <u>is</u> the War, and that Communism is the only answer for the working man.

All except two suffer from a lack of money, but each has been conditioned by society. Myron is backward-looking, Bessie is overrun with the urge for self-preservation, Morty is determined to continue his career of financial exploitation, and Jacob can only live when he is "reborn" in the new Ralph. None of these people is capable of adopting a new faith for they have been too far worked upon and made useless by society. They are the unawakened who cannot be awakened. This leaves only the younger group - Ralph and Moe and Hennie - who are the only ones Odets would allow to "learn." Of the three, Hennie does not do so because she is impure. She has

slept with Moe Axelrod, and therefore they are both tainted. They have allowed their petty desires to overcome morality; as a result, they are weak. Ralph is the only one of the younger generation -- and Odets wanted very much in this play to picture a young (i.e. new) hero adopting Communism - who remains pure and who is vigorous, militant and a seeker of truth. In short, he is the ideal person to awake and sing. He is the only possible hero.

Ralph's awakening takes place in stages. For most of the play he simply goes about bemoaning his predicament, and only turns from despair to anger late in Act II, when Myron inadvertently lets slip the information that Sam is not the father of Hennie's baby. For the first time Ralph is driven to renounce his parents' lives. When Bessie breaks Jacob's records, (the final insult which causes the old man to commit suicide), Ralph picks up the fragment of the record "O Paradise," sung by the hero of the opera when first sighting the beautiful and hopeful continent of America; now it becomes a symbolic comment on the truth as to what this supposed paradise has evolved into.

Proceeding upon this opening declaration of independence, the first clear break between Ralph and the wishes of his elders occurs when he refuses to let the insurance adjustor visit the house, at Morty's request, so soon after Jacob has been buried. When he discovers that the family plans to keep the money for all of them, rather than let it go entirely to Ralph, Bessie defends herself:

> Bessie: ...Summer shoes you didn't have...but I bought a new dress every week. A lover I kept - Mr. Gigolo! ...On the calendar it's a different place, but here without a dollar you don't look the world in the eye.

Ralph: Then its wrong. It don't make sense.
If life made you this way, then its
wrong! ...It can't stay like this.

Bessie: My foolish boy....
Ralph: No, I see every house lousy with lies and hate....
Bessie: So go out and change the world if you don't like it.
Ralph: I will! And why? 'Cause life's different in my head.
Gimme the earth in two hands. I'm strong.
(AS, III/95)

Ralph has now passed from self-commiseration to anger to determination. All he lacks is a faith to be determined and angry about, and Odets is not long in providing the proper one for him.

A phone call from his girl Blanche, telling him of the final break between them, impels Ralph to action. He rushes into Jacob's room and returns with an armful of books - undoubtedly Communist ones - which he will study.

Ralph: ...Uptown, downtown, I'll read them on the way.
Get a big lamp over the bed. ...Spit on your
hands and get to work.
(AS, III/97)

Thus Ralph alone grows, in the Odetsian sense, in that he learns to fight. Odets, however, does not bring about Ralph's awakening very successfully. He seems to imply that the truth, once understood and examined, leads inevitably to revolution. This may or may not be true, but makes for poor dramatic fare. Odets must show the causes and the logical progression of a man's realisations and changes in belief, which are not clearly shown in this play. Ralph's conversion is more emotional than reasonable, for Odets himself seems often to write more emotionally than reasonably. The scenes of Ralph's conversion are illustrative - showing his change - rather than cumulative, where they would have explained his change.

Ralph's awareness that things "don't make sense" is sudden and unprepared for. It "dawns" upon him in one illuminating moment.

Odets portrays the existent situation well; he gives the people and their immediate environment a vibrant life; but when he attempts to show a class-consciousness being aroused and awakened, it is then that he fails, for there was not actually a palpable general awakening taking place at that time; thus Odets is forced to write beyond his own experience, and in this play he is not dramatist enough to do so successfully. When his people suffer, when they do not get a chance, they are real; their bewilderment, as they move through an oppressive world which they do not fully understand, is real; but when Odets attempts to show them awakening - in this case through the person of Ralph - he fails.

The points Odets makes are repetitions of what he has already said in Waiting for Lefty and Till the Day I Die. To begin with, capitalist injustice, in keeping the profits from those who produce, keeps labor from happiness. The Bergers are frustrated because they do not have enough money; they do not have enough money because the wage-earners - Myron, Hennie and Ralph - are being exploited by their bosses. Thus this whole play may be regarded as an amplification of the Joe and Edna scene in Waiting for Lefty.

Ralph and his girl are kept from happiness by their lack of money. Both Bessie and the girl's uncle are unwilling to let the couple marry when neither is earning enough to build a marriage on. Neither of the two lovers is stupid, neither is said to be incapable of work; therefore it can only be supposed that the system is at fault, that their predicament is not caused by their own

defects but by those of society. This situation parallels that of Florrie and Sid in Waiting for Lefty and is repeated in such later plays as Paradise Lost and Night Music.

Capitalism in this play exists as a force and as a person. The person is Uncle Morty, who has worked his way up to riches from nothing, and is proud of it. He undoubtedly exploits his workers, for he himself says: "Every Jew and Wop in the shop eats my bread and behind my back says, 'a sonovabitch.'" (AS, II, i/71) Morty is the other side of the coin to Jacob, and Odets tries hard to make the audience dislike him. In Act III, when Ralph is particularly upset with regard to his girl, Morty sides with Bessie against him, while Jacob presumably gains the audience's sympathy by allying himself with the harassed boy. Further, it is Uncle Morty who, in Act III, villainously tries to do Ralph out of his inheritance.

As a force, capitalism may be recognised through its effects. Myron is a failure because he cannot understand the system, and is therefore browbeaten by it. Morty is a success because he exploits it; Moe is beyond financial worry because he has circumvented it and played beyond the rules. Ralph is bitter because he recognises that a lack of money in contemporary society hinders the full development of man.

Bessie is willing to keep her son from love, in order to keep him at the same time from poverty -"....a boy should have respect for his own future." (AS, II, ii/83)- like Edna in Waiting for Lefty, and Tilly in Till the Day I Die, she is

primarily concerned with preservation; and Jacob, the system's sworn enemy, can only look on and be frustrated.

People are ruined by the system. Moe has learned to be conquering and callous, and carries these attitudes into his lovemaking, into his personal relations, as shown when he makes Hennie pregnant but will not marry her. He has been corrupted by traffic in capitalism - the love of money and the methods used to attain it - as were Clayton and Fayette and all the rich or perverted in Waiting for Lefty.

Uncle Morty has been rendered so insensitive that he is not only willing to keep Jacob's insurance money from Ralph, but wishes to settle with the company while Jacob is still freshly in his grave. Morty is confident in his superiority, and therefore unfeeling. When Marx is mentioned in connection with Jacob, Morty tactlessly snorts:

> Morty: Marx! Some say Marx is the new God today. Maybe I'm wrong. Ha ha ha. ....Personally I counted my ten million last night ....I'm sixteen cents short. So tomorrow I'll go to Union Square and yell no equality in the country!
>
> (AS, III/94)

He is deterred from answering the insurance adjustor's ring at the door only by Moe's sudden revelation that he possesses a suicide note purportedly left by Jacob, which would invalidate the family's claim. Morty, balked, tries to blame Bessie, and his exit is managed with an equal measure of vanity and tactlessness: "Where's my fur gloves?[1] I'm going downtown." (AS, III/94)

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1. Italics mine.

Morty parallels Fatt, Fayette, the union officials, the members of the Hospital Board and the taxi-owners in Waiting for Lefty and the Nazis in Till the Day I Die. He is a symbol of the capitalist in the modern world.

Hennie let herself be seduced because it was a moment of glamour in a dull existence; it was also a surrender to Moe, someone dynamic and victorious outside and above the system in which she herself was trapped; it was also a stab at happiness by a person to whom all other avenues had been closed, presumably by the system. She is thus a direct parallel to Edna in Waiting for Lefty, who maintained that Joe's boss was throwing her "into Bud Haas's lap," (WL, I, i/12) and is another comment on the degradation which morality - Odets' equivalent to goodness - undergoes when subject to the influence of money-grubbing.

Hope, too, withers under the capitalist glare. Bessie no longer hopes; she seeks only to see that things do not become worse; Myron does not even do that, but is lost in reverie. Hennie's only hope is conceived in terms of escape, which is to Odets no hope at all. Hope has been crushed out of them by capitalism, which wishes to keep them subjugated so its minions can continue to reap their profits.[1]

If capitalism does all this then Communism is the only belief which will lead the workers out of their morass of helplessness. Jacob says this in one way or another throughout the play. Bessie, Myron and Morty laugh, but the audience does not, for Jacob's picture of Communism is clearly rosier than the Berger's present situation, and it is only those who cannot understand the

1. See p. 137.

situation, or who have lost hope, or who have illegally risen above the situation, who laugh at it.

Ralph's enlightenment - the play's message - can be nothing but Communistic. It is another example of the old generation urging on the new, and will be met with again in a later play of Odets', Night Music. As in "Lefty," the conversion is not very well prepared for; it is caused by a "last straw," and is intuitive and impulsive rather than logical. When the final break occurs between Ralph and his girl, Ralph is suddenly impelled to take up Jacob's books. i.e., his ideas - and lay out a program for action. Ralph makes a point of declaring himself Jacob's heir and, in view of Jacob's beliefs as he himself had so often expressed them, the connection is inescapable.

> Ralph: ...Did Jake die for us to fight about nickels? No! Awake and sing," he said. Right here he stood and said it. The night he died, I saw it like a thunderbold! I saw he was dead and I was born!
> (AS, III/100-101)

Communism - or the new day - can only be realised if one recognises the necessity of achieving it, and then acts. Jacob tells Ralph "This is why I tell you - DO! Do what is in your heart and you carry in yourself a revolution." (AS, II, ii/78) Ralph's "doing" seems to be Odets' answer as to how one should realise the new day- Ralph brings in Jacob's books and passionately declares that he will study in his spare time, that he will get some of his fellow-workers to study with him, and, through talk and study, they will learn, will spread the gospel, will organise other

groups who will in turn organise others, so that "...maybe we'll get steam in the warehouse so our fingers don't freeze off. Maybe we'll fix it so life won't be printed on dollar bills." (AS, III/97)

In this way Jacob is part of a tradition in Odets' plays begun by Dr. Barnes in Waiting for Lefty, and carried through to A.L. Rosenberger in Night Music: the old generation, dying or no longer competent, urges on and is reborn in the new generation, which alone has the strength and now the inclination to "DO!"

It is not enough, however, for Odets to show Ralph instigating a worldwide change; this would imply a leader and the led, or one decision bringing about total reform. Odets must universalise Ralph's decision itself, not simply its consequences, but he is unwilling to let the audience make the identification through Ralph as symbol; therefore he resorts to a "Lefty" trick, that of a sudden leap from the singular to the plural at the height of an impassioned speech:

> Ralph: I saw he was dead and I was born! I swear to God, I'm one week old! I want the whole city to hear it - fresh blood, arms. We (1) got 'em. We're[2] glad we're living.
> (AS, III/101)

This is Ralph's conversion; but Hennie also has an answer and hers seems to contradict Ralph's. She does not formulate and adopt a positive method of winning the war; rather, she escapes, and yet Odets seems to approve of this. Her escape is founded on a philosophy which Odets should abhor. She and Moe are making a

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1. See p. 67.

2. Italics mine.

separate peace with society. They are fighting only for themselves, and this is exactly the opposite to the belief Odets wishes to inculcate. It must be admitted that Hennie is renouncing allegiance to a system which is undeserving of loyalty, in which case her destructive action is positive and to be approved, but her supposedly constructive action, that of fleeing with Moe, is negative in that it precludes any fight or purposeful change. It is patently an avoidance, an escape, and yet the newly-enlightened Ralph (who must be regarded at this point as spokesman for Odets), urges them on. True, their flight is a form of revolt in that it does renounce the old system, and it does carry with it the heady aura of a fresh start and a bold decision, but it fails under close comparison, to be consistent with the progress of Ralph; Moe and Hennie never realise anything beyond the fact that they can escape by running away.

Moe is the one who, earlier in the play, had bluffed Bessie and Myron into waiting and not settling Jacob's insurance "when there's still mud on a grave." (AS, III/92) This is the first time Ralph takes a bold stand contrary to his elders' wishes. Moe, therefore, is emotionally linked to the awakening of Ralph, but Moe is a racketeer who beats the game only through illegality. This is always his answer. If Moe helped Ralph he must have been awakened himself to some degree; therefore, why did he choose the selfish and ungenerative method of running away?

There exists, then, an irreconcilable dichotomy in Odets' answer (answers?) to the economic question he has chosen to consider.

CHAPTER 5

Paradise Lost

Paradise Lost is the last of Odets' 1935 plays. Produced in December of that year, it marks the end of Odets' first and perhaps greatest period of Broadway popularity.

In theme it is akin to the other 1935 plays, but it attacks its problem from a slightly different angle. Waiting for Lefty dealt with the lower classes and the unemployed; Awake and Sing dealt with the upper lower-class, or the lower about-to-be middle-class, the employed but barely sustained; Paradise Lost concerns itself with the self-employed and reasonably affluent middle-class and with its decay, viewed as an inevitable corollary to lower-class oppression and upper-class insensitivity.[1]

The play contains two obvious actions and two barely perceptible allegorical themes. The main action concerns Leo Gordon, an idealistic businessman who goes bankrupt. He begins with a faith in the capitalist system, is shocked by what it does to him and makes people do, and rejects it finally in favor of a new faith. Associated with him and his enlightenment are his wife, Clara, and their longtime friend, Gus.

The lesser action concerns Leo's son Ben, a former Olympic Champion and world-beater at the mile run. Full of hope for a prosperous future on Wall Street, Ben marries Gus' attractive daughter, Libby. He learns the facts of business life rather roughly, however, and ends up hawking mechanical toys on street

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1. This decay is simply the other side to the "arise-ye-workers" coin, for, if the working class is to awake and sing, the middle and high classes must diminish in power and eventually fade away completely, only after which will oppression disappear and a classless society emerge.

corners. His friend Kewpie, a cabdriver-cum-racketeer, clandestinely supports Ben's household while enjoying an adulterous relationship with Libby.

The first of the allegorical themes is personified in Pearl, Leo's only daughter, who has a great talent for the piano. She is in love with a penniless musician named Felix who cannot support himself with his violin so decides to leave town - and Pearl - to embark upon a new life across the country. Pearl is left to her music, after which point her story continues largely undeveloped.

The second theme, almost as thin in treatment, is the story of Julie, Leo's youngest son, who is stricken with the sleeping-sickness. At the beginning he is hopeful that he will recover, and studies the stock-market assiduously. He plays a game with himself by investing an imaginary $1000 and seeing how far he can run it. His condition gets worse rather than better, and then he accidentally discovers the truth - that he will never recover. His story is dropped at this point and he remains a sick boy growing sicker.

This play bears many resemblances to the others in the 1935 group. Leo Gordon, to begin with, parallels Myron Berger of Awake and Sing in that he does not understand the economic system and is therefore not very successful in it. Sam Katz, Leo's business partner is capitalism - cruel, illegal, impotent and hypocritical. He is the counterpart to Uncle Morty of Awake and Sing, to the Nazis of Till the Day I Die, and to the bosses, in whatever shape or form they occur, in Waiting for Lefty. He is the enemy, to be recognized, defeated and removed.

Clara, Leo's wife, is a double to Bessie Berger in Awake and Sing, and to Edna, Joe's wife in Waiting for Lefty. They are all more forceful, dominating and practical than their husbands and all have been made cautious. Pearl and Felix are like Ralph Berger and his girl in Awake and Sing or Sid and Florrie of Waiting for Lefty - in each case the male is forced to renounce the female because he cannot earn enough to support himself and her: i.e., society kicks him down; therefore, society keeps the lower classes - those whom it oppresses - from fully enjoying love. This is a theme which will be more fully expounded and expanded in a later play, Rocket to the Moon, (1938) and will be found as well in Night Music, (1940).[1]

Libby parallels Hennie - both are young, healthy, sexually attractive, and have had pre-marital relations with men other than their husbands. Libby accepts Kewpie as her lover in place of Ben for the same reason that Hennie gave herself to Moe - because Kewpie is successful and dynamic, because he is not an ordinary man, but is out of her world; i.e., she escapes her situation by going beyond its rules and beyond its domain. Kewpie, then, is the equivalent to Moe Axelrod of Awake and Sing, and to Harry Fatt and his gunman in Waiting for Lefty - they all succeed through

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1. In the case of Pearl and Felix there is another side to their plight. Not only does the system deny them love, it denies them individuality as well, the freedom to be creative and subject only to their own wills; i.e., the best things in life, in a capitalistic society, are not at all free.

illegal force. They beat the game by ignoring the rules. They are not part of the ordinary world, and adventure with them is an escape from the ordinary world.

Mr. Pike is a counterpart to old Jacob, the grandfather in Awake and Sing. Both are communist symbols and mouthpieces, despite Mr. Clurman's argument to the contrary, and his insistence that Pike is "not a Communist or a conscious revolutionary of any sort; he is a wraith-like figure as of some wounded or undying spirit in the American soul."[1]

Gus, Libby's father, is the equivalent to Myron Berger; he understands more, perhaps, but is equally powerless to do. They are both backward-looking and dreamy, not at all decisive or active. A consistent mediocrity has turned Gus away from the present and back to memories.

Phil Foley, a raucous neighbourhood politician, is Uncle Morty in public life. He is crass, stupid capitalism identifiable with each of the successive villains or villainous forces pictured in Waiting for Lefty. Insensitive and interfering he is aware of only gross and easily accessible realities, and does not hesitate to employ official authority in order to achieve his dirty work. He is conservatism, stupidly fearful of any inconsistency or deviation; and lastly, he is a device whereby Odets, in a trick used repeatedly in Waiting for Lefty, arouses sympathy for Pike and Pike's leftist ideas which increases directly as disgust for Foley does.

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1. Clurman, p. 245.

Ben Gordon is typical of the misinformed hero of nearly all Odets' Group Theatre Plays. Full of useless promises and ideals, he eventually learns what Odets considers to be the truth. In Ben's case, however, this disillusionment leads not to the adoption of new hope in a new faith, but to helplessness, defeat and finally suicide. He is like Ralph Berger, in that they both have had little opportunity to fulfill themselves; but Ralph eventually learns to create chances for himself, whereas Ben submits to his situation and goes under.

Odets says much the same thing in this play as he did in the others. Firstly, the middle-class is surely decaying; it is unclear as to its intentions; it struggles for things it doesn't respect and consequently, it has little purpose, which results in chaos. This is the basic fact which the play attempts to prove.

The point is made in various ways. Leo Gordon's progress through the play demonstrates it. He sinks deeper and deeper into a morass of confusion and doubt based at least as much upon the fallibility and treacherousness of the capitalist system as upon his own ignorance of it and its pitfalls.

Symbolically, Julie too is capitalism, dying on the inside while laughing on the outside. He lives in a world of stocks and bonds, is buoyed up on a false dream of paper success, but contains within himself imminent disaster - the sleeping sickness. Sam Katz is a variation on Julie. He berates and insults his wife because they have no children, yet it turns out that he

himself is sterile; he is a symbol of capitalism, belligerent on the outside yet impotent in fact, solely to blame for its faults and condition.

Secondly, the middle-class is not constructive but backward-looking. - It has not any definite enemy to fight, and it is not unified in its struggle; therefore, it cannot precipitate positive action, and consequently it is confused and frustrated. This causes it to seek refuge in the past. Gus Michaels, as does Myron Berger in Awake and Sing, continually yearns for a return to the past.

Thirdly, the middle-class has become opportunistic and evil, and will resort to evil to maintain itself. Sam Katz insists, over Leo's objections, on using the services of Mr. May, a professional incendiary, in order to collect fire insurance and thus save some money from an otherwise dying business. It is Sam, also, who forces the workers to sign false pay-vouchers, and in reality pays his workers starvation wages. Phil Foley is another facet of capitalistic cruelty. When the evicted Gordons refuse to remove their furniture from the side walk while a prosperity block party is about to start, Foley calls in two insolent detectives - representatives of authority, which always supports the rich and the powerful - who apparently will use force to see that the drunken Foley is obeyed in his wishes.

Fourthly, money and the desire for it brings out the worst in many members of the middle-class. Libby takes Kewpie as her lover because, among other things, he is a better provider than Ben, and therefore his desires must be granted as well as hers. Mr. May indulges in illegal procedures because they are profitable. While he does take pride in the fact that no one was ever hurt in the fifty-three fires which he personally set, May is nevertheless an example of what depths the desire for money will lower

human beings to.

Even Clara, basically honest and kind, succumbs to the hedonistic morality induced by financial need. When May visits their house she urges Leo to accept his services, for she is the sensible one, schooled by long adversity, who will not let petty ethics stand in her way at a time of great need, much as Bessie Berger in Awake and Sing did her best to thwart the love affair between her son Ralph and a girl whom she considered a bad financial risk in marriage.

Money rules, money sets the pace, only money imparts dignity in the modern world. At one point Gus interrups a conversation and Sam scolds him:

> Sam: Excuse me please, keep quiet.
> Gus: No, I won't, I ain't your servant.
> Sam: You got the five dollars you owe me?
> Gus: No.
> Sam: So keep quiet. (Gus is cowed)
> (PL, 1/163)

Money, however, Odets adds, cannot cure its own capitalistic ills: Sam Katz symbolically spends a great deal of illegally procured business funds, in a vain attempt to regain his potency through various drugs and pills, but cannot.

Fifthly, the middle-class-and all capitalism - is responsible not only for the miserable lot of the working-class, but for its own as well; therefore it is a member of the oppressed even though it is and was the oppressor itself. Leo Gordon finally realizes this late in Act III that for all his kindness and idealism he is still an unavoidably cruel capitalist, and attempts

in an impulsive but useless action to redress this wrong by giving some of his money to a pair of homeless men who are both incongrously attending the prosperity party. "People like me," he says, "are responsible for your condition ... These few dollars belong to you not me." (PL, III/227)

If the middle-class, therefore, is decaying, backward-looking and impotent, then so is all of capitalism Odets would have one believe. It is perishing because it contains within itself the fruit of its own destruction, because its beliefs have proved invalid and treacherous. Ben Gordon is the most obvious example of this - a world champion mile-runner, afloat on publicity and promises, depending for success upon his name, personal charm and the supposed goodness of man and of the capitalistic system, sees his dreams crumble and he with them in the face of business reality. Contrary to his confident expectations, he gets nowhere on Wall Street, is reduced to hawking mechanical toys on street corners, and eventually commits suicide when he is unable to live with the truth about what he has become, much as Joe Bonaparte does in Odets' next play, Golden Boy.

After all this, however, Odets is not content to have his actions show his points; he makes additionally sure by having several characters deliver out-and-out didactic speeches. At one point Gus, Leo and Mr. Pike deliver an orchestrated harangue against the existing situation. Various contentions are made, pompously or violently - that people are fools, that life - the

race for financial security - is a dream, that the world knows not where it is going, that capitalism oppresses the working man - "The bellyrobbers have taken clothes from our backs." (PL, I/191) - that capitalism is planning another war and the people must revolt - "...tear them down from their places if they dast do what they did in 1914 to '18", (PL, I/191), and lastly, that, "Maybe our life is not lived in vain. Maybe each hour is for some profound purpose..."(PL,I/190)

Such, then, is the content of Odets' criticism of society. As in his other plays, however, Odets is not simply destructive. Having pictured the condition and effects of capitalism, Odets cannot leave it to disintegrate and result in anarchy. He must find a new and more valuable reality, a new life to be built out of the ruins of the old.

This new life, of course, must arise only after, or at least when, there are definite signs that the old life is dead. To begin with, the people must realize that society must not believe solely in financial success. Leo Gordon spent his life struggling for security, only to go bankrupt. Even while he did make a living, however, Odets seems to imply that he was not really happy. Economic security in itself should not be an end, but only a condition of happiness; therefore one should not believe in it and strive for it to the exclusion of all else, as the capitalistic society supposedly does.

Not only should it renounce financial success, but financial failure should not be equivalent in its eye to complete

failure. It must learn to fear bankruptcy less than the wrath of God, - "What is this talk of bankrupts, failure..." (PL, III/230), for there are many more important things to believe in. A new Faith must be found.

Leo's learning of all this occurs in stages. First he is made aware that, intentionally or otherwise, he exploited his workers, therefore his money rightfully belongs to them.[1] When he utters these sentiments Pike goes out to find some homeless men to whom Leo can give money. Pike returns with two, one rather silly, one rather eloquent. Leo offers then a $10.00 bill, but one of the homeless haughtily rejects it, saying that Leo is only slightly better off than they are, and that Leo has not yet realized they are all doomed.

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1. He had had this made clear to him earlier, but Katz had made little of it and Leo did not press the matter. In Act I a delegation from the shop had informed Leo that his workers get no satisfaction from a union "Legal Adviser" who "don't work for workers" (PL,I/185) but is controlled by ownership, and that they are prevented from forming a new union because their Adviser "comes to these meetings with gunmen." (PL,I/186).

Secondly, conditions at the shop are intolerable. "We keep the lunches under the table where the cockroaches run all over it." (Pl,I/186). The two radiators are insufficient, and the new gas heaters "gives everybody headaches." (Pl,I/186).

Worst of all, the workers are underpaid. Schnabel, one of the delegates, tells Leo:

> Schnabel: In the shop the girls work for one dollar a day - nine hours. Forty-five-hour week. Five dollars for girls a week, seven dollars for men. But on pay day Mr. Katz makes us sign statements we get more - thirteen and seventeen. Is this fair, gentlemen? On the wall it reads in the labour code, "Only eight hours' day." Where is it fair?
> (PL,I/185)

Leo is shocked by this - an example of the deceit and illegality to which capitalism must descend in a frantic effort to keep alive - but is advised by Katz to "Go on designing pocketbooks and don't bother your head." (PL,I/187) Nevertheless, the information is the first shock which begins to jolt Leo out of his ignorance.

> Paul: Excuse my pointing! The slight difference in our social standing is you get a whole pair of pants.... You ain't awake yet.... You have been took like a bulldog takes a pussycat!
>
> (Pl, III/228-229)

Suddenly, illogically, Leo rejects the bum's negativism and sees beyond it.

> Leo: No! There is more to life than this! Everything he said is true, but there is more. That was the past, but there is a future.... now the search is ended. For the truth has found us.
>
> (PL, III/229)

Leo, then, has found something to believe in, and makes his family aware of it. Therefore the hero in this play becomes not one man, but a group comprising Leo, Clara, Pearl, Gus, Libby and the remaining clan, who will go on together to build a new world. This seems to be the essence of Odets' positive answer, that those of Leo's class - (and of all classes?) - who perceive the truth about their existence, will begin to revolt, to struggle for clarity, for reality, for something useful and true to believe in.

What is this useful truth? - A New World, as Odets pictures it, where bankruptcy and failure and hatred are unknown, where "No fruit wears a lock and key," (PL III/230) where "Men will sing at their work, men will love...." (PL,III/230) etc., etc., etc.; Out of the ruins of his desolation Leo suddenly has a vision of a new world, so Leo continues by picturing a worldwide awakening along the lines of his own. "Clara, my darling, <u>listen to me.</u> Everywhere now men are rising from their sleep. Men,men are understanding the bitter total of their lives. Their whispers are growing to shouts!. They become an ocean of understanding!.

No man fights alone." (PL III/230) This is what Leo means when he says at the end "...We searched; we were confused! But we searched, and now the search is ended." (PL, III/230)

One might have expected Ben, disillusioned and restless, to have made the grand realization, but there are several reasons why this could not be. To begin with, Ben carries sufficient weight as a symbol of capitalistic waste and corruption. He is all show and not great, and has been made so by capitalism; therefore he has been thrown away on a dream, a futile and unachievable delusion, and all his merits wasted. Secondly, Odets was not content in this play to picture a single hero. It was his purpose to show a middle-class awakening, which requires a middle-class hero. Odets chose a group in order to impart universality to its decision and vision. This is why Clara and all the others in the room are included in Leo's last great speech - Odets' hero thus becomes a collective comprising Gus, Libby, Leo, Clara, Pearl and perhaps Julie. In this way they are not made to appear unique, thus their awakening is a general phenomenon.

Had Ben learned instead of Leo one would have been presented with Awake and Sing again. Ben is a member of a middle-class family, but he cannot be considered a true representative of that class. He has not been exposed to business for a sufficient length of time, nor has he accumulated enough wealth or the usual accoutrements of respectability - a home, a car or a family - to be considered a member of the middle-class. Therefore it is Leo, and not Ben, who must make the grand realization.

To accept this group one must be willing to swallow a whole series of blanket reversals of character. Libby is an opportunistic degenerate; Gus is a backward-looking dreamer who talks but does little; Leo is an idealistic and political innocent, Pearl an artistic innocent; only Clara in the whole crew possesses at least the bare makings of a hero, (or heroine). It must be imagined, therefore, that all these characters are capable of heroic action now that they have been given a purpose they can share. Pearl, who had nowhere to go, who wanted but did not know what she wanted, (much as did the Bergers in Awake and Sing,) now will have something to do; Gus need no longer dream; Clara need no longer keep up her constant attempt to maintain normalcy in the face of fear, tension and frustration; Julie, if he still lives, need not exist on dreams; and Leo will have something constructive to do, beneficial rather than harmful. This is Odets's message - that only when the middle-class realizes what hampers its growth and happiness, and then proceeds to remove this hindrance, will it have order, peace, and the satisfaction which can come only from living in a classless society.

A note must be made here of the play's many symbols, some hitherto unexplained, some still obscure, which Odets saw fit to include in the body of the play. Pearl Gordon, Leo's daughter, is the artist who cannot stomach the real, unidealistic world, but Odets employs her for far more than that. Her piano-playing is an objective correlative to the state of hope as it waxes and wanes throughout the play. When things look darkest, when Julie is about

to be sent to the hospital, when the family is being evicted and Leo has been refused a loan, Pearl stops playing; but at the point where the family will begin to take positive action, where Clara will defy Foley, where the homeless men with their negative pessimism will arouse Leo to a positive vision, Pearl resumes her playing once more. Her playing is the pure, the ideal, the free, which could not exist in a subjected context.

A similar correlative is Gus' motorcycle. Originally in the best of shape - "...the best motorcycle in town," (PL, I/171) it deteriorates as do the fortunes of the Gordon family until, in the third act, when the Gordons are being evicted from a home they have lived in for seventeen honourable years, the motorcycle is discovered in a sad state of disrepair, with a wheel missing. Julie's condition is a third barometer which keeps pace with the decline and fall of the Gordon household, except that no indication is given whether he picks up in spirits as Leo goes into his ecstasy at the end of the play.

Gus has a habit of nocturnal shaving.

> Leo: Two and three in the morning I find him shaving in front of the mirror.
> Pike: He wants to look good.
> Leo: But three in the morning? For whom?
> Pike: Man has to have something.
> (PL, II/206)

Gus' shaving, like Clara's repeated interjections to "take a piece of fruit," (PL, I/161) becomes an attempt to preserve order in a context of imminent chaos.

Pike makes a reference to stake-burners. He has just finished a violent tirade against capitalism American style:

Pike: ...Dispossessed like me, like another sixteen million in a walking death: unemployed! Then what?
Gus: A new administration!
Pike: Don't be no medium-sized rabbit, Gus. (Exits).
Gus: No one ever called me that before!
Pike (poking head in at door): Citizens! The fearful heart starin' from your eyes. Directly descended from stake burners, I admit it! Good night. (Goes).

(PL, II/206-207)

It might be that Pike is referring to Gus' - and by implication the whole country's - unwillingness to make a clean break and take a decisive, deliberate step. Stake-burners are arch-conservatives blindly and frantically trying to stamp out something they fear will bring change.

Gus seems unwilling to "...tear them down from their places..." (PL, I/191) and wants to settle instead for a more conventional way of achieving change - "A new administration." (PL, II/206).

A more puzzling and complex symbolism is the relationship between Kewpie and Ben. Odets uses their childhood to make a comment on society when, at one point, Ben speaks of a skating outing during which one of their companions fell through a hole in the ice and the two of them, who had gone into the water after him, were unable to save him. Ben says:

Ben: ...We're still under the ice, you and me - we never escaped...Christ, Kewpie, tell me, tell me - who died there - me or you or him or what?

(PL, II/202)

The inference, one presumes, is that Danny, their dead companion, had gone on to another world while they had simply returned to a living death.

They exist, along with Libby, in a complex of love and hatred. Childhood friends, one has become a gangster while the other batters out a living in petty commerce. On the surface their relationship seems to be homosexual - at one point Kewpie hits Ben in anger, then begs Ben to hit him in return, much as a lover would try to humiliate and castigate himself for an offense to his beloved.

Kewpie cheats on Ben by sleeping with Ben's wife, yet supports Ben's household. He does not do this solely to appease his conscience, for he honestly loves Ben and would have befriended him regardless. He hates Libby because she has usurped his place in Ben's affections and because she is not good enough or loyal enough to Ben, even though he himself is the instrument of his disloyalty, but sleeping with her is an odd way to consumate his hatred. It must be supposed, then, that his desire for Libby is at least as great as his love and friendship for Ben.

Ben, on the other hand, feels himself a failure beside Kewpie's financial success, even though Kewpie maintains "He got everything I ever laid my hands on first," (PL I/175) even though Kewpie never stops admiring Ben or the myth of Ben which he carries around "...like a medal." (PL, III/223)

At one point Ben spits on an Olympic statue of himself, thereby rejecting the idle, illusory capitalistic dream of financial success based on charm and goodwill. Kewpie comes immediately behind and wipes the spit off with a clean silk handkerchief. After they leave, Julie stands looking intently at the statue -

Julie: ...Who was it had the wooden horse, Poppa?
The Trojans?
Leo: The Greeks. They made a beautiful civilization.
(PL, II/205)

The inference here is not primarily an emphasis on the order and beauty of classical Greece as compared to the chaos and bitterness of modern-day living; rather, a three-pronged comment has been put into Julie's mouth, each application characteristically inappropriate to Julie himself.

To begin with, but unreasonably for the Wall Street - conscious and in-doctrinated Julie, Odets is criticizing the ideals by which his society lives. The statue is like the Trojan horse and like the illusory capitalistic fundamentals - showy on the outside but containing little merit within, and disastrous if trusted.

Secondly, and unconsciously by Julie, the reference to the Trojan Horse is a simultaneous attack upon Kewpie and Libby; each is a deceitful treasure which Ben has taken to his bosom in good faith, but which leads only to his destruction.

Thirdly, Kewpie's worship of the statue and what it represents to him - magnificence rather than toughness, grandeur rather than petty living, popularity among the solid and acceptable rather than notoriety among the poor and cheap - is also in error, for, like the Trojan Horse, it belies its appearance. Ben's statue means nothing in the business world; it represents a world of smiles and apparent goodwill which vanishes at the smell of money, and Kewpie is untrue to the racketeer part of himself when he admires it.

Yet, for all his admiration, Kewpie seems still to have carefully and accurately appraised Ben's true worth, even though he acts in most cases as if he were not really aware of this. He speaks honestly when, just after Ben and Libby have been married

he threatens to reveal to Ben her pre-marital infidelity.

Libby: You and that soft juicy body, like a mushmelon. You're a hundred miles away.
Kewpie: Suppose I tell him what happened when he went to Europe?
Libby: He don't believe such things about me. He'd throw you around for saying it.
Kewpie: Don't you know he's yellow in his heart? Get wise to that skyrocket: starts with a bang!
Libby: Ben's the most handsome man I know.
Kewpie: A burnt out spark plug?
(Pl, I/174)

Kewpie eventually does tell Ben, but even then he cannot overcome his friendship. When Ben flares up Kewpie is abjectly sorry:

Kewpie: You wanna kill me? Who gives a good goddam! Here! (Draws gun and shoves it in Ben's hand).
Ben: My hand might slip.....
Kewpie: Let it...
(Pl, II/204)

If Kewpie is the outlaw, and Ben represents the normal person who fails within the law, why does Kewpie so admire Ben -- especially when he knows Ben to be insubstantial in fact? Because of Ben's innate goodness? If Kewpie is the bad element in human nature, does he still continually and fundamentally desire to be good? Does he admire the good because of this yearning -- even if he cannot himself attain it?

The Kewpie-Ben-Libby triangle must be regarded as a comment on the state of modern man. Kewpie the gangster, the successful fighter, seeks to preserve the myth of Ben Gordon, pure and great Olympic champion with the world at his feet, even after Ben himself, through his actions, has disproved the estimation and rejected the society which spawned it. Odets is implying, as will become evident in his later plays, that human nature - at least as it is found in the common man - has an ineradicably persistent inclination towards the good and the great in spite of circumstance or position, and that man is capable of being good were he given the

proper opportunity. Kewpie and Libby and Ben are what they are because they have been conditioned and corrupted by the economic system; they are not inherently bad in themselves.

Secondly, Kewpie's admiration of Ben and what he is supposed to stand for may represent the continual urge of man to succeed legally. This implies that men are not by nature lawbreakers, but are forced to become criminals by their situations. An important corollary to this is the belief on the part of Odets that all struggles worth winning can and must be won within the rules. That is why Kewpie admires what Ben stands for, even after Ben himself has failed those principles.

Kewpie and Ben and Libby are mixed up; they have been rendered so by the economic system and its effect on their lives. That is why Ben fails as a businessman and finally resorts to crime, why Libby takes Kewpie as her lover, why Kewpie can be a friend to Ben and at the same time the seducer of his wife. They are members of the middle class, and their values are shifting and crumbling. With nothing to believe in but expediency and money, (which expedites almost everything), morals and ethics and stability waver and become indefinite, and so people do silly things in an attempt to find something to believe in, or to build a barrier against the uncertainties of society and the economic system, or to experience thrills which alleviate the boredom and indignity of modern living, circa 1935.

There remains a definition of Leo's new world. This is never made directly in the play, but is implied. Firstly, Pike spouts anti-capitalist mouthings and is heatedly branded a "red" by Foley. Since Foley has made himself highly disagreeable to the

audience, his condemnation of Pike's ideas was very likely to induce the audience to accept them. Later, when Leo adopts ideas similar to Pike's, the audience has no difficulty associating Leo with Pike, Pike with "red," and "red" with right.

Secondly, in his last thundering definitive speech, Leo uses phrases and ideas which in 1935 carried with them leftist associations, especially to audiences who had seen Odets' three earlier plays that year. The general overtones of this speech are decidedly leftist. "There is more to life than this." "No man fights alone." "Yes, I want to see that new world. I want to kiss all those future men and women. What is this talk of bankrupts, failures, hatred....the world is for men to possess." "No fruit tree wears a lock and key," (PL, 111/230).

Especially significant are the words "sing" and "love." The first denotes the coming of the new Communist world, and the second is a symbolic equivalent to that new world.[1] Leo says, "Men will sing at their work, men will love." All these phrases emphasize communal living, a new world which "is in its morning," (PL, 111/230) and men working together. For a 1935 audience which looked for leftist connotations, Leo's final speech could not have been interpreted otherwise.

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1. For a more extensive use of "love" as a symbol of the new world, see p. 149.

CHAPTER 6

Golden Boy

Between Paradise Lost and Golden Boy, a period of some twenty-three months, the conditions of Odets' life had changed. He had gone to Hollywood after the failure of Paradise Lost; his salary was now $2500.00 per week, and he was courting Louise Rainer, twice an Academy Award winning actress. Whether this affected him or not, he made no attempt in Golden Boy to resurrect the browbeaten, 1932 vintage working-class milieu he had used earlier. Odets had been stung by Paradise Lost's financial failure, and wished to write something which had more of a chance in the commercial theatre. Golden Boy, therefore, is an out-and-out plea for popular, more than left wing, success; it is the first major break with his past form, and remains perhaps the most financially successful of any of Odets' Group Theatre efforts.

Unlike the 1935 plays, it does not have Jewish characters as its leads, although the Bonapartes, in their actions and reactions, are Jewish in everything but name. Unlike Awake and Sing and Paradise Lost, it has a quick succession of scenes, a milieu of business world rather than the living room, harking back to Waiting for Lefty. Like the 1935 plays, however, it carries the usual message. This may not seem apparent at first glance, because of the structural disparity between Golden Boy and its predecessors, but closer scrutiny reveals its intent as common with that of the 1935 plays.

There is only one plot, and it concerns Joe Bonaparte,

a "cockeyed," insecure, chip-on-the-shoulder young man with an incipient talent for the violin, who chooses rather to gain quicker fame and riches through boxing. He selects Tom Moody as a manager and fights against his father's wishes. His concern over injury to his hands, which prevents him from becoming a ring killer, is removed by the romantic attentions of Lorna Moon, Moody's mistress, with whom Joe falls in love.

Gradually, Joe becomes more calloused in character as well as in physical condition, until he kills an opponent in the ring; suddenly he realises that he has become an animal, and, knowing that he can never return to the violin because of his broken hands, goes off with Lorna in a fast car and crashes to his death in what is presumably a suicide. Golden Boy is thus a rags-to-riches story in reverse.

Both sides of the conflict of values are contained for the first time in one man. Joe could have earned a respectable if not luxurious living playing the violin, it is intimated, but chose boxing. He gained fame and fortune but lost his soul. After his most important bout, in which he killed his opponent, he realised the error of his ways, saw that he had become a chattel to men who did not care for him as a human being, became aware that his true inclination was always for music but, knowing that he could not return to his old ways because he had been too far corrupted, he took Lorna, who finally left Moody and came to him at this moment when their need for each other was greatest, and off they went in a fast new Duesenberg car which cost $5000.00 second hand, to "mow down the night with headlights." (GB, III, ii/316)

A rather crude story, but then Odets is at times a rather crude writer, The basic theme or conflict upon which the play revolves, the disparity between the fist and the fiddle, is invalid. Boxing is not necessarily more cruel or impersonal or degrading than playing the violin. A man earns a living by performing acts - that is his profession. If one person has a skill in manhandling others, if he chooses willingly to match that skill against another's, and if people are willing to pay to see such a contest, then boxing is a logical and legal way for one to earn one's daily bread.

The violin is equally a medium for subsistence. That some musicians can do extraordinary and beautiful things with the instrument must be granted, but it is as well evident that other men may be able to do similarly extraordinary and beautiful things in a boxing ring. Art, in these cases, is the refinement of action to beauty, and can manifest itself in many ways.

Further, no indication is given, beyond Joe's own word, that his methods of attaining success were not quite up to what he might have done -- that, in fact, boxing was a perversion of his true self, that he was born to be a violinist and nothing else. The process of degeneration is explained, but the alternate choice is not. Joe Bonaparte could just as easily have been a talentless nobody who, were it not for his skill in the ring, would have remained forever a nobody. The fact that he is a violinist at all is fortuitous.

The second theme, that of a sensitive soul pitted against a materialistic, ruthless and uncertain business world, is also a trifle weak. Joe regards music as a medium for total expression: "...When I play music nothing is closed to me. I'm not afraid of people and what they say. There's no war in music..." (GB, I, 1/263) but someone else may not see music in this way, or may see something else in the same role. As Joe sees his music, it is not inherently different from boxing, for boxing as well allows him to be "not afraid of people and what they say."

Golden Boy contains many character-types found in Odets' earlier plays. There is Eddie Fuseli, a cold-spoken killer who takes over as Joe's manager in order to advance him as quickly as possible. Characteristic of capitalism, it is only when the ruthless Fuseli is behind him that Joe can get anywhere, can get the big fights and the big purses he desires. Fuseli is the counterpart to Moe Axelrod in Awake and Sing, to Harry Fatt in Waiting for Lefty, and to Kewpie in Paradise Lost, in that he has succeeded by going beyond the rules. (I.e., in a society whose rules offer little chance for success because they are treacherously deceitful and fruitless, the more aggressive will be forced to take matters into their own hands and live without the rules.) Therefore Fuseli, like Axelrod and Kewpie, is an effect of the social system, and comments on the efficacy of capitalism.

Fuseli learned to kill in World War I and has carried this forward into peacetime life, implying that peace in America is still war, although perhaps of a different nature. Fuseli is

the personification of the force which acts on and corrupts Joe. He transforms Joe into a copy of himself, a resemblance which holds true not only in regard to attitude and reaction, but is carried right down to a similarity in clothes and speech.

Mr. Carp, a Jewish candy-vendor who quotes Schopenhauer, is similar to old Jacob in Awake and Sing, and to Pike in Paradise Lost; they exist solely as mouthpieces, as measuring sticks, as chorus. They spout the Communist standard to which the play's situation is compared.

Roxy Gottleib, the opportunistic boxing promoter, is a stock comment on what a capitalistic society does to people. He is greedy and heartless, not fully human, like Uncle Morty in Awake and Sing, like Sam Katz or Mr. May in Paradise Lost. Each is bloodthirsty and resorts to any methods when necessary. Roxy dislikes what Fuseli does to him when Fuseli attempts to take over Joe, but they are both of a kind. Gottleib operates through his power and connections, Fuseli operates with a gun as a persuader, but both use force to gain their ends and both have the same disregard for individual personality. Gottlieb must scramble about madly in an attempt to keep his boxing club going, which has a great number of court judgements upon it, and this furious scurrying has left him bereft of humanity.

Siggie, Joe's brother-in-law, is imbued with the capitalist dream of success. He is much like Gus in Paradise Lost -- each has a talent of sorts, each could achieve a little success if someone would stake him to a few hundred dollars, but no one does. Speaking of Mr. Bonaparte, his father-in-law, Siggie says to his wife Anna:

> Siggie: ...He don't wanna help me out, your old man. He wants me to drive a company cab and submit to the brutalities of the foreman all my life, I could be in a healthy little enterprise for myself, but your old man don't wanna help me out.
> (GB, I, ii/246)

Siggie only wants a small success. He continually talks of a "little enterprise."

A life of petty achievements and disappointments has made him cautious:

> Anna:..I'd like to fly.
> Siggie: Stay on the ground! Fly! What for? Who do you know up there? Eagles?
> (GB, I, v/268)

Both these men, Gus and Siggie, are forced to remain employees - with all the personal degradation this carries in their minds -- because of a lack of money. In both cases, the lack of a sum as small as a few hundred dollars serves to embitter their lives.

In theme as well as in characters, Golden Boy is related to the 1935 plays, although it looks at the problem from a different point of view. Where Awake and Sing and Paradise Lost showed depression followed by awakening, (i.e., the characters changed from black to white), Golden Boy is far less static. Its leading character does not simply adopt new ideas; he changes in being, which no character in the earlier plays had done. In the earlier plays the characters had been discovered as products of society; society had already worked her harm on them, and they were set up as window-displays, as examples. Joe Bonaparte, however, is shown while society works its changes upon him. This, and not any awakening, is the prime feature of the play.

The killing precipitates the hero's moment of awareness

an old device which Odets first used in Waiting for Lefty. Joe realises what Ralph Berger and Leo Gordon came to know, that the capitalist system is illusory, deceitful, disastrous and contrary to the good in human nature. Joe, however, does not contain within himself the simple elements of the hero, for he has been tainted by the society he renounces; (Odets has added a few colors to his usual black and white. The villain is not as blatantly villainous or repulsive as before, at least as personified in the human being, nor is the hero as pure or as victimized). Moreover, Odets has clearly pictured Joe's degeneration; therefore the point has been made with sufficient force to allow Odets to dispense with the positive action after the realisation of "the truth," and so Joe Bonaparte commits suicide. In this play, unlike all the others treated so far, it is what happens throughout the drama that is important, not what occurs in the last five minutes.

The points Odets makes in this play are, as one would expect, repeats of what he said in the 1935 group.

1. Economics still governs people's actions. Joe Bonaparte comes from a lower middle -class family. His father is a fruit vendor, and has managed to save up $1200.00 with which to buy Joe a violin for his twenty-first birthday, but for Joe this life lacks the opulence which in his mind only money can give. His father's home seems to him dull and tawdry, because he has been conditioned to associate quality only with grandeur and wealth.

Siggie, Joe's brother-in-law, speaks of Mr. Carp's candy and stationary store:

Siggie: That's a business? A man who runs a candy store is an outcast of the world....
Carp: And your taxicab business makes you higher in the social scale?
Siggie: So I'm an outcast too....

(GB, I, ii/244)

This is the attitude pervading Joe's life. He is a nobody, and he wishes to become someone. The violin holds little promise in his eyes, so he turns to the prize ring. He wants to become a capitalist among capitalists, for it is the only equivalent he knows to success. Odets is here implying that in a society based on classes and distinctions those on the lower rungs will attempt to mount in a desire for security and a search for power and recognition, thereby causing friction in society. If the distinctions and classes are financially determined, then those on the bottom can only hope to ascend by accumulating money or securing a powerful position. Such attempts are wrong, Odets implies, but inevitable in a capitalistic society.

This is what happens to Joe. Led on by the false dream of success, as was Ben Gordon in Paradise Lost, Joe succeeded where Ben did not, but at the cost of his soul. Ben tried to get along within the rules established by the upper classes for the lower classes, but which the upper classes do not themselves observe, and failed because the rules were not intended to allow the little man to succeed: Joe stayed half in and half out of the rules -- Fuseli's help must be regarded as extra-legal -- and succeeded but could not live with such a "success." Joe has thus been wasted by

society, and his waste occurred primarily through the effects of society upon him. Capitalism therefore, is contrary and injurious to human nature, and wasteful of it.

Frank says this explicitly at the end of the play. While he is on the phone receiving the news that Joe and Lorna have died in a car crash, Moody and Roxy are bickering with Fuseli over who owns what part of Joe:

> Moody: There's laws in this country, Fuseli! - contracts! We live in a civilized world - !
> Frank(loudly, to the others): Keep quiet! (Resumes listening). Yes...yes...
> Roxy (to Eddie): And there's a God in heaven - don't forget it!
> Frank(on the telephone): Say it again...(He listens). Yes.
> Moody(to Eddie): You're a killer! A man tries to do his best - but you're a killer!
> (Frank lowers the phone and comes down to the others).
> Frank: You're all killers!
>
> (GB, III, iii/320)

A few moments later, as they prepare to drive out and identify the bodies, Frank has the final word.

> Moody: I don't believe that! Do you hear me? I don't believe it --
> Frank: What waste! ...
>
> (GB, III, iii/321)

There are others who serve as examples of the effects of the crushing force of society, and of the way economic need can govern actions. These people are tied down, are denied happiness, by a lack of money. Tom Moody cannot divorce his wife and marry Lorna because he does not possess sufficient cash to buy his wife off. When Joe will not fight aggressively because of a fear of

of injury to his hands, Moody is forced to use Lorna as a come-on to encourage Joe's killer instincts. Moody must swallow the insults of Fuseli in order to hang on to his small and precarious percentage of Joe's winnings. Continually, Moody is forced to degrade his better self in order to get ahead, and after a while it does not seem to him as terrible as before. Only occasionally do streaks of humanity show through the shell he has been forced to erect about himself through long immurement in adversity. This is one of the affects of capitalism -- it confirms one in callousness.

Lorna herself is confused. All she has to show for her life is Moody, and she does not love him. She has sold herself to him as much for comfort and out of pity as out of gratitude for the kindness and tenderness he offered her in a world of strangers. Lorna has been forced to strike a rather poor bargain with the world. She can never stop feeling like a tramp, and only half lives. She almost never has the satisfaction of having done something fully, of having experienced it to the limit. Capitalism will not let her be happy -- her final stab at happiness, through Joe, is doomed because neither of them is equipped to hack out a success in the jungle of modern-day America.

2. Society is cruel and one must be cruel in order to succeed in it; <u>i.e.,</u> one must renounce human kindness and decency and adopt what Odets believes is an unnatural savagery. That is what happens to Joe. Society and economics corrupt him so that he becomes brash, crude and murderous. He breaks his hands and can never go back to the violin, signifying symbolically that he has gone too far in his new environment ever to be able to re-enter the old. Symbolically, also, he kills an opponent -- the world

of materialistic success requires that one "kill," remove, surpass or beat one's rivals in order to get ahead.

The trouble with Joe is that he cannot be thorough in this. He rose too quickly in the business world, and too much was demanded of him in the way of ruthlessness when he had not been exposed to the evil effects of society for a period of time or intensity sufficient to confirm him in the unwavering and unquestioning acceptance of ruthlessness which Odets feels the business world demands. Not being able to comply with such demands, Joe can escape only through death.

There is not here, as there was in the 1935 plays, a detailed picture of the misery of lower-class life. This is so because the context of the play is one of business, and rather successful business at that; but implied in the play is the picture which Odets has Lorna specifically paint of modern society:

> Lorna: ...Somewhere there must be happy boys and girls who can teach us the way of life!. We'll find some city where poverty's no shame - where music is no crime! - where there's no war in the streets -
> (GB, III,ii/316)

Odets is here implying that all the features Lorna wishes to do without are precisely those which characterise any large industrial city in America at that time.

Siggie tries the normal routines for success, and fails; only when he is aided by Fuseli's presumably illegally-acquired funds is he able to make a start towards financial comfort. Odets is saying here that, as with Ben Gordon in Paradise Lost, the normal devices of hard work and honest thrift avail not in modern society,

and one must break the rules to get ahead.

Having indicted society, Odets must now propose an alternate system. As in the other plays, this turns out to be Communism. There is no violent call to action; no hero trumpets forth a program designed to achieve a new world; but Communism is implied, if it is not directly proposed, as the answer to society's ills.

Joe's true nature, the violin, was corrupted by society into the fist, but the violin is not made the alternative to the prize ring. Odets points out another choice, and this is represented in Joe's brother Frank. Frank is a foil for Joe, a measuring stick, an idea brought to life. He is one of the other roads Joe could have taken.. If Joe's fist is negative, the violin is simply zero. A positive action, a plus action, would have to be more communal than violin-playing, and Frank is the answer. Late in the play Eddie Fuseli measures Frank, who sits with his head bandaged after receiving a wound in a strike battle:

> Eddie (to Frank): You got a good build - you could be a fighter.
> Frank: I fight....
> Eddie: Yeah? For what?
> Frank: For a lotta things I believe in....I'm not fooled by a lotta things Joe's fooled by. I don't get autos and custom-made suits. But I get what Joe don't.
> Eddie: What don't he get? ...
> Frank (modestly): The pleasure of acting as you think! The satisfaction of staying where you belong, being what you are...at harmony with millions of others!
>
> (GB, III, iii/318)

Frank is a union official, fighting to get his men better wages. Odets is implying that Joe's urge to success was wrong because it was selfish. He sought only personal riches and comfort. Further, it was wrong because he sought it in the wrong place; he sought to join the enemy and be the best among them, rather than beat them. Frank is right because he neither beats the enemy at their own game nor seeks selfish ends. His is a collective fight.

The reference to unions, further, while not an out-and-out Communistic implication, is yet one indirectly. In 1937, when this play was produced, a strong leftist aura was still attached in the public mind to unions and the key word "worker," and there is no doubt that Odets employed these words advisedly, knowing how the audience would be likely to react to them.

An even stronger proof is the nature of Joe's realisation. His opponent's manager, choked with grief, had just informed Joe that his opponent is dead.

> Joe: ...Everybody knows I wouldn't want to kill a man. Lorna, you know it!
> Lorna: Of course!
> Joe: But I did it! ...Lorna, I see what I did. I murdered myself, too! I've been running around in circles. Now I'm smashed! ...I'm no good - my feet are off the earth!
>
> (GB,III,ii/315)

But Lorna will not let him believe this and whips up his enthusiasm:

> Joe: But my hands are ruined. I'll never play again! What's left, Lorna? Half a man, nothing, useless....
> Lorna: No, we're left! Two, together! We have each other! Somewhere there must be happy boys and girls who can teach us the way of life! We'll find some city where poverty's no shame - where music is no crime! - where there's no war in the streets - where a man is glad to be himself, to live and make his woman herself!
>
> (GB,III,ii/316)

Since no such town existed in America at that time, and since certain key words in Lorna's speech - "poverty's no shame" - could only have leftist connotations for a 1937 audience which looked for leftist connotations in Odets' plays, the conclusion must be that the ideals of this play are undoubtedly Communistic.

To sum up, this is what Odets has to say about American society in this play:

1. Businessmen are oblivious of the individual; those who succeed break the rules; businessmen have been made vicious; to succeed, one needs to be insensitive and cruel, for society is so.

2. Economics govern people's actions; people suffer from a lack of money or in order to accululate it; the lack of money embitters lives.

3. Capitalism corrupts people, it renders them callous; it makes them insensitive to its own cruelty and to theirs; it withers hope and initiative; it gives people false and treacherous values which lead only to disaster; it is contrary to the best inclinations in human nature; it wastes people; it confuses people; it frustrates people; it keeps people from being happy; it makes poverty something to be ashamed of, and financial success the only desirable success; and it creates a struggle between the rich and the poor which is unnecessary and whose effects are disastrous upon those not fortunate enoughto be in the upper classes.

The following are the bases of his answer:

1. A true society, which allows each man to lead a full , honest and unfrustrated life, cannot exist where one man preys on another.

2. Each man must do what he is meant to do, and must be free to be able to do so. Capitalism does not provide such freedom.

3. The true life is lived in harmony with others. This is Communism. It must be striven for, and when it is achieved the ideal society will become possible.

Thus Golden Boy, for all its popular appeal and seeming lack of Communist propaganda, is fundamentally similar in its message and its indictment to the 1935 plays.

CHAPTER 7

Rocket to the Moon

Rocket to the Moon, first appeared in November of 1938, approximately one year after Golden Boy. Here once again is a single setting for the whole play, as in the 1935 dramas; once again the pace is slow and a Chekhovian "rambling" is resorted to; the central characters are openly Jewish; the appeal is not based on quick changes of scene, a forceful and vibrant milieu and many different types of people, as in Golden Boy; rather, everyone seems of the family. There are no major individualized villains.

To this extent Rocket to the Moon is much more closely allied to the 1935 dramas than to Golden Boy, but, while there is much that is similar, there is also much that is different. This play comes three years after the 1935 group; Odets had not remained static through these three years, so that Rocket to the Moon is different from its predecessors. It is, first of all, a romance - Odets himself has labelled it Romance in Three Acts; it deals, on the surface, with love more than with the economic war; it has less characters than any of his other plays, and it does not shriek as shrilly as any of them.

Each of the characters is influenced by the economic situation. Frenchy, a chiropodist, pops into Ben Stark's office when Odets is at a loss how otherwise to use up time or keep the action going. Frenchy acts as a chorus by interrupting periodically in comment. He explains himself to Stark, he explains Stark to Cleo, and he explains the play to the audience.

He earns no more than $20.00 or $30.00 a week but is curiously satisfied with it, since it is enough to allow him to indulge in his petty yet pleasing hobbies, of which he says, "Does General Motors himself get more fun?" (RM, III/403). Stark's reply, unquestionably Odets' as well, is "But you're a man!" (RM, III/403) implying that Frenchy's limited scope of desires is far less than that at which a true and full human being should aim.

Frenchy, then, is modern man devoid of ambition, but Odets seems to fall into uncertainty here. If Frenchy has not been satisfied with his lot, what should he have done? Had more ambition? But ambition in this case would be the urge to accumulate more money, and it does not seem logical for Odets - as exemplified by the rest of the play - to be in favour of this.

If one follows the dictates of the earlier plays, Frenchy's ambition should be directed toward communal good rather than selfish enjoyment, but Frenchy is happy; therefore he is living a full life according to his (limited) desires; therefore why should he seek more?

Obviously Odets is intimating that Frenchy does not aim high enough. Frenchy's ideas are wrong, and Frenchy received his ideas from society, therefore society is wrong. Frenchy thus becomes a symbol of modern man, a variant on Ben Stark - he has had all worthwhile ambition crushed out of him by the capitalistic system.

Next there is Phil Cooper a dentist who shares an office with Ben, and earns next to nothing. He cannot earn a living even

though he is a good man, by Stark's admission better than himself. In order to support his opphaned boy he is forced to sell his blood. "They" and Congress are doing precious little to help him, he claims. "Why can't I make a living?" he says. "..I'm ashamed to live!...Did you ever see such times? Where will it end if they can't use millions of Coopers?..."(RM,II,i/376).

Cooper, then, is an outright symbol of the inability of capitalism to provide for all of its members. Odets generalizes Cooper's situation by resorting to the old device of having a generalization come at the peak of an emotional speech -"..Millions of Coopers?..."

Ben Stark, D.D.S., a good man by his own admission, earns "sixty dollars a week, while men with half my brains and talents are making their twenty and thirty thousand a year." (RM,I/330). He, too, is a comment on the economic war. If Stark is a good man and makes little, those who earn more have attached to them by innuendo an aura of illegality. In the system in which Ben lives, Odets seems to be implying, honesty and sweat mean little. Cooper, too, is smart and tries his best, but gets nowhere. If honesty does not succeed, then opportunity exists only for those who go beyond the law.

Stark, then, barely gets along, and he has lost his ambition. He has become apathetic and meek, he simply plods from moment to moment in a colourless existence. "He's not a happy man," Frenchy says. "He spends his days trying to exhaust himself so he can fall asleep quick." (RM, II,ii/383).

Stark feels he has done nothing to be proud of; his work does not excite him; but what is one to make of this? Is Odets implying that Stark's work is capitalistic waste, as boxing was in Golden Boy? This does not seem likely, for Odets regarded the healing arts as noble; therefore it is safe to catalogue dentistry as respectable. Then why is Stark apathetic? Why is he not proud of what he does? Why is he not vigorous and ambitous? The answer, Odets seems to be saying, is that any profession is degrading, no matter how noble its origin, when it requires a man to be too much occupied with the struggle to earn a living. The art of dentistry is noble, the profession is wasteful of human nature. Ben Stark is a humiliating man because he has little chance to be proud; his work does not excite him, and he "spends his days trying to exhaust himself so that he can fall asleep quick" because he never feels that he is or will ever be on the way to fulfiling himself as a human being. His job does not let him do this; it has beaten him. He has resigned himself to his situation, to his failure, to his subjugation.

Odets, then, is condemning the whole system of private enterprise, saying that any job in such a set-up does not allow men to live full lives, for capitalism wastes men by not allowing them to achieve their potential, by diverting their efforts to senseless, talent-draining activity.

Stark's wife Belle is as colourless as he. She is loyal and conscientious, but lacks imagination, and this, along with a fear of failure impossed by the economic system, (which restricts her from fulfiling her social and monetary potential), makes her

cautious, hesitant, logical rather than bold. She takes no chances. She is in the same situation as Ben, although because of fear rather than apathy.

She runs Ben. She is a millstone about his neck, and yet she is in some ways a more admirable character than he. She has learned to accept what she believes to be her lot, and therefore her caution, which Odets finds a fault, is yet a positive action designed at least to maintain the status quo. Ben, at the beginning, does not even do this much; he simply lets his wife control him.

She does what she does because she honestly believes it is right for both of them. She convinces Ben that it would be futile to accept her father's offer of backing to open a new office in a new district. This is the pattern she follows throughout the play - dull, loyal, unimaginative, conservatively correct, patient - all the qualities of a drayhorse. She has fallen into a marriage routine where love is dormant and docile, rather than dominant and urging, and this pattern has extended itself to her affair with life. She is what she is because of fear of economic failure; therefore she is a product of the capitalist system and not to blame for her own faults. She is the equivalent to Edna in Waiting for Lefty, Bessie in Awake and Sing, and Clara in Paradise Lost.

This is what Odets would wish the reader to believe, but the point is made weakly. Stark and Belle are both dull, colourless people, and it is a trifle far-fetched, in view of the evidence presented, to say that they both became as uninteresting as they are solely because of their economic predicament. Their

marital apathy is at least as much caused by their inherent dullness as by any lack of success Stark may be having as a provider of daily bread. They are basically flat, monotonous specimens, constitutionally incapable of heroic advance, and so economic adversity could only have sharpened their natural insipidity.

Stark hires a new secretary, Cleo Singer. She is young, attractive and naive. She is asked out by Mr. Prince, Belle's wealthy, widowed father, and by Willie Wax, a lecherous Hollywood dance director. The product of a poor family, infuriated by the apathy and slovenliness of her whole life, prevented from fulfilling herself by a lack of money, she is hopeful of escaping through her talent as an actress and dancer.

She is Odets' heroine. Poverty is degrading and insulting to the human soul, Odets says, and Cleo is admirable because she realizes it and wants to fight her way out. She does not know quite how and therefore must learn before the play is over. She is a counterpart to Ralph Berger in Awake and Sing.

Poverty makes her do ridiculous things. She lies continually in order to glamorize her background, and is pathetically obvious in so doing. She goes out with Mr. Prince because he is clearly a man of success and power who intrigues her. She goes out with Willie Wax because she feels he may be able to help her achieve recognition in Hollywood, and is too naive to discern his amorous intents until faced with the fact of his advances.

Willie Wax is a big man both in New York and Hollywood, and Cleo is impressed by his importance. He is a bachelor - "an artist hasn't time for that [marriage], dear." (RM, II, ii/386). He is the symbol of all rich, powerful, evil men, brother to all the oppressors in the 1935 dramas, to Uncle Morty in Awake and Sing, to Sam Katz in Paradise Lost, to Roxy Gottlieb in Golden Boy. He attempts to seduce Cleo, but his crime is not desire; rather, it is dirtiness, the way in which he attempts to gain his ends, and the stigma of dirtiness is one which Odets attaches to almost everyone of his characters who is rich, and consequently evil.

Lastly, there is Mr. Prince, Belle's father, whom she hates and who cordially returns the feeling. He is the other side of the coin to Stark in that he is successful, independent and self-governing, but he is oppressed with more-or-less the same malady. He is frustrated because, even though he has made much money, he has not really satisfied his soul. He is a Golden Boy who has not committed suicide. His fondest dream was to be an actor, but he had to give this up - his true bent - in order to succeed in the financial race. He and Stark have both lost their ambition, both drift heedlessly through a meaningless existence - even though he seems to know it and Stark doesn't.

He is the opposite to Cleo - worldly, sophisticated, mature, wealthy, and the opposite to Wax, for he does not greatly abuse his power. His function in the drama is symbolic. He represents a certain force in society, and a certain type of man. On the one hand he represents enlightened money, but money nevertheless; he is a basically intelligent and reasonable being

hardened and toughened by materialistic success; on the other hand he is a wasted potential. He is not altogether kind nor evil, but money has had its effect on him.

The main characters have in common a spiritual unrest, conscious or unconscious. What happens when Odets throws them together? Stark hires Cleo as his secretary. Prince points out to Stark the barrenness - literally and otherwise - of his ten years of marriage to Belle, and suggests he indulge in extra-marital activity. "Have an affair with - with - with - this girl... this Miss Cleo. She'll make you a living man again," (RM, I/350) he advises, after which Stark begins to look at Cleo more closely.

After a month in New York's summer heat with Belle away, Cleo seduces Stark; but Odets would have the audience believe nothing more than companionship comes of it. Belle, after a while, apparently sniffs something in the wind and hurries back to town, offering to be her husband's secretary. She is refused and leaves, after which Stark in turn seduces Cleo. This time, apparently, their affair is consumated.

Belle returns again at a later date. Stark reveals the truth to her, but, notwithstanding her urging, cannot bring himself to renounce Cleo. Mr. Prince enters and declares he will compete with Stark for Cleo by way of proposing marriage to her. Prince's tactic is to demonstrate clearly Stark's problem - he will not leave his wife - and Cleo is made painfully to see this. She asks Stark to send Prince away and keep her, but he doesn't. She is shocked to her soul and Stark, driven at least to face the truth, tells Cleo he will give her up. Cleo then rejects Prince and leaves both men forever, to go off into the night alone.

This is the basic fabric of Odets' tale. In outward appearance it would not seem too clearly akin to Golden Boy or the 1935 group; once, however, one gets beneath the theme of love, which is symbolic, economic influence begins to be discovered once more.

Cleo and Stark mate, as Odets says, out of "a swelter of heat, misunderstanding, lonliness and simple sex!" (RM, II, ii/380). This, however, is not all. Each of the characters has been brought by the capitalist system to the point he or she occupies at the beginning of the play; what happens once these people are put together, logically, must as well be blamed on the capitalist system.

Worry about wage-earning leaves little time for love or for living a full life. This is what is wrong with the marriage of Ben and Belle. Frenchy says this explicitly:

> Frenchy: Who can do that today? Who's got time and place for 'love and the grace to use it?' ...the free exercise of love, I figure, gets harder every day!
> (RM, III/404)

This is similar to the predicaments of Sid and Florrie in Waiting for Lefty, of Ralph Berger and his undernourished girlfriend in Awake and Sing, of Ernst and Tilly in Till the Day I Die, of Pearl and Felix in Paradise Lost and of Joe and Lorna in Golden Boy.

Money, therefore, or the lack of it, controls peoples lives. A capitalistic society in which the onus is upon financial success at the cost of all else does not let people live full lives in that it makes them mechanical servants, frustrated, helpless and possibly cruel.

Capitalism also confuses people, renders them ignorant. Prince does not learn in the Odetsian sense throughout the play. He does not clearly discern why Cleo rejected him. He makes his pitch and, having failed, will subside into his old self to run out his uneventful, frustrated existence as ignorant as before. Belle has been made aware of little beyond the fact of her husband's infidelity. She and her father are effects of the society they live in: they have been too greatly worked upon to be saveable. They cannot see the faults of their society because they are too much a part of it, and are controlled by it. They have been rendered dead by it.

While society makes some negligible, it makes others cruel. Willie Wax is such a person. His whole life is centered upon taking advantage of others, because this is the only way he knows to succeed. He is not an out-and-out lawbreaker of the Axelrod or Kewpie type; he is more like Roxy Gottlieb of Golden Boy - he has reached his position through pushing and a constant abuse of his power, until this has become habitual with him. Thus he has been permanently corrupted - he tried to seduce Cleo because he could not do otherwise.

Prince, too, for all his goodness, has been made vicious in that he seeks his ends viciously. Conditioned to give no quarter when cornered, he is willing to break his son-in-law's heart, to be ruthless and merciless to him, in order to satisfy himself. A further indication of his state of being is the fact that he tries to win Cleo on logic rather than love.

Society is also frustrating. On a fundamental level there is Phil Cooper, who cannot even earn a living and is rendered bitter à la Ralph Berger. On a more refined plane there is the anguish suffered by those who realize the limits society places on the spiritual expansion of their lives. Stark dislikes his dullness and the lack of excitement in his life, but he is subconsciously, not consciously frustrated. Belle's defensive mechanism has performed the same feat for her - she is not consciously aware of the dullness of her life. Cleo, on the other hand, is painfully awake to this. She lacks almost all luxury, and has been nurtured in a continuum of poverty. Prince is a success financially, yet he too feels unfulfilled.

Destructively, then, Odets repeats what he said earlier. His indictment of society has not changed, and this play may be regarded as an amplification of the Sid and Florrie episode in Waiting for Lefty. The emphasis here is not on basic facts such as a bare living wage and the problem of securing the next meal, as it was for the jobless cabbies in Waiting for Lefty, for the impoverished Berger family of Awake and Sing, for the soon-to-be impoverished Gordon family of Paradise Lost, or for the hunted, persecuted Communists of Till the Day I die. Rocket to the Moon, as did Golden Boy, emphasizes the spiritual rather than the physical problem.

Constructively, however, Rocket to the Moon is far less obviously akin to Odets' earlier plays.

Waiting for Lefty called for an out-and-out physical war against the bosses, and Till the Day I Die did likewise symbolically; Awake and Sing pictured the awakening of the down-trodden masses to a point where they begin to study in preparation for the struggle to better their lives and the social structure, and Paradise Lost presented a similar awakening among the more wealthy middle-class; Golden Boy, while not proclaiming a violent call to arms, at least offered a picture of what men should do - Joe chose the wrong path, his brother Frank the correct one. Rocket to the Moon, however, does not go even this far. It offers the vaguest constructive plan.

There are only two heroes, Ben Stark and Cleo. They are the only people who learn. Frenchy knew the truth all along, but he is no more than a mouthpiece, as was old Jacob in Awake and Sing, and Pike in Paradise Lost. Likewise, Prince cannot be accorded a hero's role because he does not seem fully aware of what Ben is saying when Ben makes his final realization at the end of the play. Earlier, Stark had been equally disinterested when Frenchy spouted forth Odets' central theme.[1]

If Ben is a hero, what has he learned? That society has made a robot of him? That society make Willie Wax cruel? That society drained him of ambition and enthusiasm, robbed him of any chance for happiness, and caused his marriage to Belle to subside into a routine of boredom and subconscious frustration? That society made Cleo lie and posture? That society made Mr. Prince frustrated and heartless?

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1. (RM, III/403-405)

Stark seems to learn something, but it is not definitely any or all of these. He is an odd sort of hero indeed.

> Stark: ...For years I sat here, taking things for granted... Then just for an hour my life was in the spotlight... I saw myself clearly, realized who and what I was. Isn't that a beginning? Isn't it?...
> Prince: Yes....
> Stark: ...For the first time in years I don't feel guilty.... But I'll never take things for granted again. You see? Do you see, Poppa?
> Prince: Go home, Benny....(He turns out the lamp)
> Stark: (turning out the other lamp): Yes, I, who sat here in this prison-office, closed off from the world....for the first time in years I looked out on the world and saw things as they really are...
> Prince: (wearily): It's getting late.... I
> Stark: (almost laughing): Sonofagun! ...What don't know would fill a book!
>
> (RM, III/418)

One would have expected him to accept his father-in-law's earlier offer of help in setting up a new office in a more promising location, or at least to have said he would think about it, but Stark does little more than exclaim "sonofagun!" His only claim to heroism is his avowal that he will "never take things for granted again,"(RM, III/418) but Stark is not really in a position to be jubilant. He did not leave his wife because he could not. He is not free, he is bound down by obligations and financially—induced fears; thus his boast of "never tak[ing] things for granted again" seems only to indicate a fresh look at his situation, not a change of it. Further, it is difficult to propose that he will change greatly in the future, for Odets has not endowed him with many heroic attributes.

Cleo is therefore the only clear-cut victor, for she alone takes a positive step after the great realization. She is faced with a choice of men, and rejects them all. Cleo is a counterpart to all the fresh young heroes in Odets' earlier work - she has lived a life of degrading poverty which has caused her to do ludicrous things, which has made her lie, which has prevented her from fulfilling herself. She seeks a way out of her predicament. Symbolically, she has three choices.

Wax is one way. If she takes up with him she will become a lawbreaker and immoral; she will be following in the footsteps of Moe Axelrod of Awake and Sing, Kewpie of Paradise Lost and Eddie Fuseli of Golden Boy. Wax is not suited for her because he cannot offer her love; he cannot because he loves only himself. Love is here a symbol for the new life which Cleo seeks. Wax cannot offer her love because he has been too far corrupted by the old world; thus, when she rules out Wax, she rules out success through illegality.

Stark is another way. If she goes with him she elects to attempt to get along in the conventional manner, à la Joe in Waiting for Lefty, or Myron Berger in Awake and Sing, or Ben Gordon in Paradise Lost. She rejects him because he is not free to love her as she wishes to be loved. Symbolically, Cleo cannot live a true and full life in a capitalist society because it does not offer what she wants.

Prince is the third way. If she takes up with him she will attempt to gain comfort through exploitation, by being a cap-

italist in a world where only the capitalists are comfortable. She will attempt to join the ruling force, à la Joe Bonaparte. Whereas Stark earns a living according to accepted formula of work and thrift - and gets nowhere, - Prince "earns" a living through someone else's labour, and prospers abundantly. His stocks do well; he need only pick up a phone to show a profit for the day. He is at the other end of the ladder to Stark, but they are both on the same ladder - capitalism.

He tries to win Cleo on logic rather than love and fails. Symbolically capitalism is incompatible with freedom, with a full life. Prince employs logic because he has nothing else to offer; symbolically logic becomes the capitalist virtues, and are unacceptable - Cleo rejects Prince for the same reason she rejects Stark - both men, representing different facets of capitalism, have been too far corrupted to be able to offer her what she desires. Prince has become a successful capitalist, and Stark is a lower member of the same society, but both are frustrated: both are unfulfilled; neither is a success in any other way, so both have nothing to offer Cleo. Symbolically, <u>nothing</u> in capitalism can help found a true and full life. Cleo understands Prince because both felt unfulfilled, but at the end of the play Cleo has learned how to overcome this - or at least has become aware that certain avenues definitely do <u>not</u> lead to fulfillment - while Prince has learned <u>nothing</u>. In rejecting all three, Cleo symbolizes the new generation, which refuses to erect a new world composed of anything tainted from the old. A new existence will have to be formed

afresh, In this way Rocket to the Moon is similar to the other plays, for it does imply a destruction of the old world before a new one can be created even though the implication is not as violent, warlike or merciless as was the cry in 1935.

Cleo speaks of "a love that uses me, that needs me... I'm a girl, and I want to be a woman, and the man I love must help me be a woman!" (RM,III/416-417). Prince begs her:

> Prince:...Give me a chance. I know your needs. I love your needs...What do you have to lose?
> Cleo (immobile): Everything that's me.
> Prince (passionately): You can't refuse me! What do you want?
> Cleo: I don't know....
> Prince (as above): By what you don't know you can't live! You'll never get what you're looking for! You want a live like Heifetz's music - up from the roots, perfect, clean, every note in place. But that, my girl, is music!
>
> Cleo: I'm looking for love...If I can't find love here, I'll find it there.
> Prince (insistently): Where?
> Cleo: Somewhere...How can I tell you what I mean?..
> Prince: You'll go down the road alone - like Charlie Chaplin?
> Cleo (to both men): Yes, if there's roads, I'll take them. I'll go up all those roads till I find what I want.
>
> (RM,III/416)

And off she goes into the night. The "love" which she is looking for is a symbol for a new faith upon which to found a new existence. If one accepts Odets' picture of America as portrayed in the characters of Rocket to the Moon, no such love exists there; therefore Cleo's love could only be an ideal, part of a new world yet to be built. In this way Cleo is rejecting capitalism. She then asks:

> Cleo: ...Don't you think there's a world of joyful men and women? Must all men live afraid to laugh and sing? Can't we sing at work and love our work?
>
> (RM, III/416)

This is the closest one gets to a specific communistic definition of the new world, for these same sentiments, in almost the same language, form parts of the key Communistic speeches in the other plays. Lorna Moon, in Golden Boy, spoke of "happy boys and girls who can teach us the way of life. We'll find some city where....a man is glad to be himself; to live and make his woman herself." (GB, III, ii/316). Leo Gordon, in Paradise Lost, rhapsodizes "The world is beautiful. No fruit tree wears a lock and key. Men will sing at their work, men will love." (PL, III/230) Awake and Sing bears a resemblance in the very title, and Ernst Tausig, in Till the Day I Die, says "My present dream of the world - I ask for happy laughing people everywhere...for wonderful baby boys and girls I ask." (TD, I, i/112).

Thus Rocket to the Moon, for all its seeming political innocuousness, continues the tradition of Odets' plays in that its condemnation of society and insistence upon the establishment of a new world are similar to the earlier plays, and this new world is given, if not a specific Communist label, at least a communistic overtone.

CHAPTER 8

Night Music

Night Music opened in February of 1940, approximately 14 months after Rocket to the Moon. One might have wondered if, by now, Odets had perhaps a new string to his lyre, but what comes out is the same old song, newly-clothed. The 1935 group were blatantly bitter and adamant; Golden Boy clothed its message in popular, quick-moving garb; Rocket to the Moon hid itself behind the facade of the problem romance. Night Music represents another step in the development of Odets as a playwright only insofar as its mood is different from his other plays, for there is very little new in ideology.

It is like Golden Boy in that it has many scenes; its characters are not labelled with Jewish names; it is not situated in a home, but out in the business world. Nevertheless, it is similar to the 1935 group and Rocket to the Moon in that its characters constitute more-or-less a family. There is a family feeling in Night Music akin to that in Awake and Sing and Paradise Lost, and unlike the outside-worldliness of Golden Boy.

All that was shrill in 1935, that turned popular in Golden Boy, that turned romantic in Rocket to the Moon, has now become wistful, haunting, lonely, comic, like a mournful saxophone; but underneath there is largely the same old message.

The story concerns a girl named Fay and a boy named Steve. Steve has been arrested when one of two trained monkeys

in his possession attempted to snatch a locket from Fay, a passing girl. From this point Odets develops a cominal romance between the two, aided and abetted by Abraham Lincoln Rosenberger, New York's most famous detective. The two young people fall in love and Steve is carried from despair to hope as the play ends.

Clustered about these three central figures is a whole galaxy of secondary ones, exemplifying a great number of things which form the background and secondary message of the play. As with most of Odets' dramas, the background contains a number of comments independent from,but not necessarily dissimilar to, the message contained in the central tale.

Theme One is capitalistic waste. In Central Park Steve encounters a little man walking a dog. This little man is getting old, is no longer able to earn a living, cannot support his wife and doesn't love her. He is a wasted person in society in that it is not able to make use of such people after they can no longer earn a wage. Capitalism has crushed adventurousness out of him, and he looks back to the "good old days," à la Myron Berger in Awake and Sing. The Little Man's wife is a comment on the duplicity people will resort to in order to live - she read tea leaves and told fortunes for a living. Furthermore, their loveless situation is a comment, à la Rocket to the Moon, on the difficulty of love in a wage-earning, money-grubbing society.

Al, Rosenberger's brother-in-law, is another wasted product of the capitalist system. He dreams of fortunes he could

have had, had not someone stolen an idea for a movie, or a melody for a song, either of which would have brought him instantaneous success. In reality he is a petty businessman who fights with his wife and displays an astonishing lack of tact. He is similar to Julie in Paradise Lost, who dreams of wealth while he is dying, and to Myron Berger of Awake and Sing, who harkens to a glorious past while being nothing in the present. They are frustrated without fully knowing it, for they have nothing to show for their lives. They dream of what could have been "If only..." Al has been wasted by capitalism in that he no longer has a constructive ambition. He has within himself only a fruitless sense of futility; i.e., he has been rendered incapable of valuable action by capitalism.

Theme two is homelessness. Roy Brown is a homeless man whom Steve encounters in Central Park. Roy gets himself arrested for spitting in the subway, and it is "The first time in weeks I had my three squares a day." (NM, I, v/85) His condition - homeless and jobless - is Steve's and many others', and he is a comment on the ends to which the homeless are put to maintain themselves. He is a foil for Steve, and is used by Odets as a recurring threat on the part of Steve, in that Roy has decided to escape from economic struggle by joining the Army. Odets regards this as the coward's way out. In addition, Roy is one of many who has been deprived of the supposedly simplest joys by a lack of money; i.e., the present economic situation keeps the average man from happiness.

The Hotel Algiers contains a bevy of homeless people. A sailor has a girl and wants a room for the night, but cannot get

one. "Hell," he says, "fight for you and die for you, but you don't care for me! Its only a lousy sailor!" (NM, I, iii/52) He is refused a room because the avaricious owner, (the relatively rich and evil person in power), can charge more to civilians, who are quieter besides.

Libby is in the hotel, a pathetic whore who has fallen in love with one of her clients and wishes to marry him, but apparently has little chance of ever doing this. "I can't stand it. If its over I'll dry up and blow away." (NM, I, iii/56) She is a symbol of the millions who try desparately and unsuccessfully to find something stable and respectable to hold onto in a precarious and generally cruel world. Ostensibly brought to her condition by economic pressure arising out of a faulty system, she is another who is prevented from enjoying the pleasures of life, and only manages to get along in the economic war through illegal and degrading means.

Also in the hotel is the drunk Mr. Nichols, who occupies the payphone for inordinate lenghts of time, continually calling "Nickels for Mr. Nichols. Haha! Haha!" and who, it is imtimated, has really no one to phone and pathetically tries to fool not only the hotel residents but himself.

Outside the theatre where Fay works, Steve meets Mrs. Scott, an actress whose only sense of roots is achieved when she puts "curtains and shelving in the dressing room" (NM, I, ii/25) to provide a pseudo-security. Others of her craft, who pass by chattering and disappear, are equally rootless, "...a flock of birds in passage," (NM, I, ii/28), Odets calls them. They are symbolic of present-day man, who cannot settle down in security but must continually attach himself to transitory and therefore fruitless

things.

A Third theme, the apparent cause of homelessness and waste, is the lack of jobs and its resultant degradation and misery. Hoy Brown has no job, the beggars have no jobs, Mrs. Scott and all the actresses, including Fay have no jobs, and the Little Man is similarly bereft. All are degraded by this. Gus, a Hurrying Salesman, represents one of the effects of this situation. He attempts to foist upon Steve and Fay a supposedly stolen fur piece, asking $15.00 for a pelt which "...would stand you eighteen hundred bucks where it comes from." (NM, I, iii/55). He steals Steve's suitcase and, when the patient Rosenberger returns with both, Steve lies in order to let Gus go free, implying that it may not all be Gus' fault. Gus is another facet of modern man - shady, devious, hurrying, whining, crooked, degraded and wasted.

There are many characters who are representatives of the effects of society on men. Outside Fay's theatre Steve is accosted by a beggar who offers to match Steve for a dime, takes the few last pennies which Steve gives him and goes off distrustingly. The beggar has been so toughened by economic hardship that even charity arouses in him nothing but greed and suspicion.

Mr. Gilbert, an official of the Hollywood company, for whom Steve works, is another product of modern society. He fires Steve without giving him a chance to explain, He does not believe in fair play, and admits this. He can see only dollars, and gauges everything in terms of money. He is of the rich and powerful and insensitive and cruel, and he is the true cause of the general economic plight of the poor.

Furthermore, that which Mr. Gilbert represents - Hollywood, or big business, or the economic powers that be - are shown to exist in a state of waste and confusion. The company spends sixty thousand dollars in one week-end waiting for Steve to arrive from New York with the trained monkeys, when all the time they have what they're looking for right on their own lot. This confusion and waste, Odets intimates,which is prevalent among all of big business, is also responsible for the general economic depression.

Mr. Tucker, Fay's father, and Eddie Bellows, her ex-fiancé, represant another force in society. They are the "heavies" personified, standing for unimaginative, lower middle-class conservatism. Mr. Tucker is horrified at his daughter's wish to become an actress because,out of his dull conformity, he accepts views blindly on being told to do so. Eddie, on the other hand, makes a virtue of evil. Smoothly and knowingly, he tries to oil Fay back home. While it cannot be clearly demonstrated that Mr. Tucker is what he is because of society, Eddie is most definitely a capitalistic effect. He is an example of what the economic rat-race does to human beings morally and spiritually. He is smooth without feeling, using whatever talents he can draw on solely to gain money. He has no other goal or ideal in life. He is a salesman, and succeeds on the glibness of his tongue. The out-standing facts about him are his insensitivity and lack of good-will. He is a modern product,successful but inhuman.

Two more characters, both products of the economic

struggle, play minor parts in the drama. There is Arnold, a Milquetoast nephew and yes-man to Gilbert, who is willing to prostrate and demean himself and be hypocritical in order to ingratiate himself with his superiors. A counterpoint to him is Marty, a bellboy at the Hotel Algiers, who is saucy, shrewd and independent. He is similar to Eddie Bellows in that both are aggressive, ruthless, opportunistic, devious, perfectly adapted to their environments. The only difference between them is method - Marty uses force and peasant cunning, Eddie relies on a smooth tongue.

Two or three people in the play are wholly symbolic, and attain varying degrees of success or intelligibility. There is a Sinister Man who appears for a moment like a fleeting shadow, and is dispelled like fog by the appearance of Rosenberger. Presumably, he represents the evil which lurks always in the immediate background, kept out only by law, which is based on reason.

More enigmatic is the Greek waiter who hovers about the breakfast party, thereby infuriating Steve and instituting an exchange of insults and threats. When the party leaves, the waiter stands looking after Steve with genuine scorn. It is difficult to ascertain what he symbolizes. He cannot be the ancient culture laughing at the modern, for Odets loves and has a great hope for America and her prospects.

Another bit of obscure symbolism involvs a drunken vegetarian who keeps on insisting "I'm not guilty of bloodshed! My hands are clean!" Symbolically one could spin an endless web out of this, but suffice it to say that Odets does not, and therefore this intermezzo is best left unexamined.

Tying these people and these symbols together is the central story thread. This concerns, firstly, A.L. Rosenberger, who has spent 32 years on the New York police force. A man of inflexible honesty and patient persistence who always seeks the truth, he is willing to stretch his opinions for humane reasons. He carries an unvanquishable torch for the city of New York, and suffers from cancer. He is Santa Claus, the older generation, wise, patient, gentle, instructive, always present to stave off disaster - and on his way out.

At one point he is told Steve's mother is dead. He makes an insistent point of finding out how she died; he asks Steve twice, and the answer - is presumably supposed to have some significance. Rosenberger himself suffers from the same disease, and, if he is the old order dying, Steve's mother may be another such symbol; but it seems the fact of dying should be important, not the particular manifestation it took. The special significance of cancer, in this case, is not revealed.

Fay is not quite as homeless as Steve, but she has lost her job. She is more searching, inquisitive and independent than Steve. She left a conservative, boring home in Philadelphia to try her hand at acting in New York. She has rebelled at the unimaginativeness of her middle-class milieu, and is determined to get more from life. Her first job ended when the show she was in failed.

Steve, the co-protagonist with Fay, is a belligerent, enbittered, average young man of twenty-three who puts a bold and fierce face to the world but is comically weak underneath. He has failed to succeed in the business world being at the moment an

$18.50 per week errand-boy for a Hollywood movie company. Out of his lowliness arises his belligerency, for he is constantly being rebuffed by life. He has little hope because he has become accustomed to failure. He is a transient in a world he cannot take hold of or settle down in, and Odets labels him "Suitcase Steve".

All the themes are combined in him. He is jobless, homeless and orphaned, but the outstanding facts of his existence are oppression and futility. In physical terms, four policemen of varying ranks arrest and hold him for what he feels to be a ridiculous reason, and are instrumental in having him fired from the first job he has had in two years, and which he has only held for five weeks. Mrs. Scott, whom he meets outside Fay's theatre, almost has him arrested when she mistakes him for a thieving magazine-subscription salesman. A stagehand humiliates Steve in front of Fay by insulting him and beating him up. Marty the bellboy manhandles Steve mercilessly; a Greek waiter insults and scorns him; Mr. Gilbert fires him.

The significance of these oppressions is Steve's inability to retaliate. When he attempts positive action he is ludicrous. At one point a Second Sinister Man emerges from the background in Central Park and Steve belligerently orders him to move on, only to discover that the fellow is blind. This is representative of all Steve's efforts before his enlightenment - he battles shadows, is beaten by all, and is therefore depressed and humiliated.

In its basic criticism of society, Night Music is a throwback to 1935. Waiting for Lefty depicted the oppression of the poor by the rich; the poor were being expolited, and were urged to fight in an attempt to better their situation. This same battle against exploitation and its subsequent harm is also the hope and message of Awake and Sing and Paradise Lost. Golden Boy concerned itself more with the effects of society on the spirit than the pocketbook, and Rocket to the Moon inspected society's crushing of man's potential love-life. Night Music, however, must be considered a return towards the original starting point. Odets has not quite come full circle back to Waiting for Lefty, but can at least be said to have described a generous, backward-curving arc.

Night Music emphasises the basic insecurity of people in modern society, as does Waiting for Lefty. It is true that many people have been damaged spiritually in this play, as was Joe Bonaparte in Golden Boy; it is true that they cannot lead full emotional lives, as is the case with Stark and Belle in Rocket to the Moon; but the basic fact of their existence is their lack of the most fundamental security, that of being able to earn just enough for bed and board. Early in the play Fay describes modern society:

> Fay (with sudden fervor): People are so unhappy.
> Oh, believe me, people are so very unhappy!
> (NM, I, v/103)

Steve describes the World's Fair, which bleats of a glorious tomorrow in the face of an inglorious present in terms

reminiscent of Paradise Lost's prosperity block party, thrown by the politician Phil Foley while the Gordons are being evicted from their home, and attended by several homeless and jobless men.

> Steve: They call this place the world of the future....The world of tomorrow, don't they? It don't feel any different than the present an' past. I couldn't get in here without the buck....I don't respect that world of the future. Here's this Fair - it don't guarantee me meals...

This is not Steve's predicament alone. Odets is careful to generalize Steve's position. When Rosenberger asks "But how can you be so personal?" Steve replies:

> Steve: Personal? I'm not being personal - there's millions like me, tens of millions! Where do you get this personal stuff? And all of us - each one - we got a time bomb tickin' off in us.
>
> (NM, II,iv/161-162)

Later, again speaking of the American scene, Steve says:

> Steve: ...I'd like to meet this Mr. Whiskers. He don't know I'm living, Uncle Sam....They say there's jobs? That's cricket water! ...They slammed me outa twenty states - I was up for vagrancy in five! What've I got to sing about, me and a million others? ...I vamp around an' I vamp around an' nothin' happens - you can't get a start...

and again Odets generalizes Steve's position:

> Steve: ...You're keepin' me there on a low A when I'm good enough for a high C! ...that harmony boy who mighta been! ...Make this American for me. Make this America for...those harmony boys who mighta been! Make this America for us!
>
> (NM, II, iv/180)

This is the situation in America. Steve is representative of all American youth who have not been given a chance to develop. From this point Odets must make heroes out of Fay and Steve. They must learn how to fight back.

To do this they must renounce the old world, as all of Odets' heroes have done. They must be stripped of all hindrances, of all entanglements, of all impedimental loyalties or misgivings.

Spiritually, this becomes a renunciation of their pasts. With Fay this is not difficult, for she is ready for a new adventure. When her father comes from Philadelphia to take her home - with Eddie Bellows along to lend his tongue - both fail, and in rejecting them Fay is symbolically discarding the old order and all that it implies - conservatism, conformity to outmoded ideals and subjugation of spirit, of personality. She is ready for the new faith because she has already made an attempt to find it. She is constitutionally ready because she has shown courage in the face of adversity.

Steve, on the other hand feels little but despair.

Early in the play he complains:"Why don't I swim far out in the ocean and never come back? Why don't I do that quaint little thing?... Who'd know? Who'd care? Suitcase Steve is dead! Who'd give a damn!

(NM, II, iv/177)

Just as he is about to board a plane for Hollywood, after having been rehired by Mr. Gilbert largely through the efforts of Mr. Rosenberger, he is suddenly informed by the sycophant Arnold that he has been fired again.

Steve: I'm ready to resign from the human race.
Rosenberger: You resign too easy, young man....
Fay: But you expected this since Saturday - to lose your job.
Steve: Some day I expect to die, too!
Fay: But not today. Because this is <u>our</u> day! ..,This is the day we dared to look at the future....
Steve: You see a future in the army?

(NM, III, ii/233)

Having lost his dwelling, his security, his little niche in the world, Steve becomes convinced that civilian life offers him nothing but continued frustration, and decides to join the army, which offers security, room and board, companionship and purpose all ready-made, needing only to be accepted.

From this nadir of despair and frustration, Odets must imbue Steve with hope and then a new belief. These are both accomplished through the cajoling and spirited goading of Fay and Rosenberger, who, between them, sting Steve into making the great realization. When Steve says: "You see a future in the army?" Rosenberger answers:

> Rosenberger: Army? What army? You're a member now of the biggest army in the world? (Now that Steve lacks all security, having been fired, he is at one with the downtrodden of the 1935 plays.) Can't you see there's war right here, right under your Greek-American nose?
>
> Fay (with mounting excitement): ...It's war to make a living, to keep respect, to be in love! ...Steve, where are your eyes? Don't you see you're at war, right now, yesterday, last year - and right here?! ...Are you such an ignorant boy?!
>
> Steve (Growlingly): Who's ignorant?!
>
> Rosenberger (Promptly): You are ignorant. Because your fight is here, not across the water. You love this girl? And you mean it? Then fight for love! You want a home? Do you? - then fight for homes! Otherwise, excuse me, you are a rascal and a liar!
>
> (NM, III, ii/234-235)

Steve is asked to realize what the hero of every play except Golden Boy became aware of - that there is "war in the streets," (GB,III,ii/316) that people are being wrongly exploited, that many lack homes and jobs, that many are unhappy and bitter and frustrated

and confused and suspicious and vicious and bereft of hope. He is told that "things don't make sense." (AS,III/95)

To combat this, he needs hope.

> Fay (listening): Do you hear what I hear? ...The last cricket...Crickets are my favourite animals in all the world. ...All night they make their music... ...Night music.... If they can sing, I can sing. I'm more than them. We're more than them....We can sing through any night!
>
> (NM,II,iv/160)

Sumbolically, this is what Steve learns.

In Waiting for Lefty the heroes constitute a whole group of cabbies and their families who are ready to fight; In Till the Day I Die it is a whole political group; in Awake and Sing it is Ralph Berger and his friends; in Paradise Lost it is Leo Gordon, his remaining family and friends; in Golden Boy it is Joe and Lorna who wish to fight but are prevented from doing so; in Rocket to the Moon the heroine is Cleo, but her purpose and aims are vague, overly-general; she has yet to find what she seeks, and the play ends with her in a state of searching. In this play Steve and Fay are the heroes, and they are perhaps the most promising in Odets' succession. In an amplification of the "Interne Episode" of Waiting for Lefty, Rosenberger becomes the older generation, dying but wise, passing on his wisdom to the new. Steve and Fay are a boy and a girl in love; i.e., they are the whole human race to come. They are youth learning to stand on its own two legs and take over the world. They are a collective hero, similar to the 1935 type.

But what are these heroes to fight for? They seek security, since it is their most fundamental lack, but how are they

to achieve or guarantee it?

Late in Act II Steve delivers himself of a bitter indictment of America, and ends:

> Steve: ...Make this America for us!
> Rosenberger: A certain late Cardinal, an old friend of mine, he spoke like you.
> Steve: He spoke? Spoke? Why didn't he do?
> Rosenberger: Maybe he died too soon. But you won't die soon. Fix it, make it, change it.

This is Rosenberger's advice - change it. At this point these entreaties are sufficiently vague to be applicable to almost any socio-political doctrine.

Later, at the close of Act III, one begins to expect that the pattern of a communistic ending à la 1935 will repeat itself when Rosenberger begins to describe society in terms strongly reminiscent of 1935, "Can't you see there's war here, right under your Greek-American nose?" and Fay adds "Mr. Rosenberger's right.... It's war to make a living, to keep respect, to be in love!" (NM,III,ii/234) If one remembers a verbal exchange which occurred in Act I, when a Sleeping Man, who awoke suddenly in the lobby of the Hotel Algiers and asked "Any war news?", was answered by a prostitute named Dot "Sure. ...It's Saturday night again." (NM,I,iii/66) and the words of Lorna, in Golden Boy, who speaks of "war in the streets," (GB,III,ii/316) and the exhoration of Agate Keller, who, in the final scene of Waiting for Lefty, shouts at the cab-drivers:

> Agate: ...It's skull and bones every inch the road! Christ, we're dyin' by inches! ...Slow death or fight! It's war!
> (WL,I,vii/30)

Then one begins to anticipate the same message for Night Music as was assigned to these other plays; but this apparent connection between Night Music and the 1935 plays, implying a leftist basis to the changes which Rosenberger wishes Steve to make, is outweighed by Rosenberger's final speeches. At the end of the play, when Rosenberger once again pleads with Steve to "change it" - the logical place, the crucial moment for a leftist overtone to be given to these proposed changes - no such implication is forthcoming. Instead, the emphasis is on the struggle to change, and on a peaceful method of attaining it.

> Rosenberger: ...Are you high voltage, as you like to boast? Then remember this - "The preservation of the sacred fire of liberty..is in the hands of the people." Washington said that - its on the statue. You are the people. Whatever you want to say, say it!. Who told you not to make a new political party? Make it and call it "Party-to-Marry-My-Girl?" ...Run for Mayor on that ticket and see what happens...
>
> Fay (earnestly): You'll get five million votes!
>
> (NM,lll,ii/235-236)

One must apply here the same rules for discovering intent as were used throughout. The key sentence - "Whatever has to be changed, change it!" - is not followed by any sudden call to action. There is no electric vision of a new world, of men fighting together. There is no rapturous leap at this point from the singular to the plural; only a nice quiet desire to "make a new political party." Instead of going to war, instead of spreading the Communist gospel, instead of mounting the barricades, Rosenberger

suggests a peaceful reform, surely the farthest thing in the world from "Slow death or fight. It's war!"

The key word "sing" occurs here, it must be admitted - Odets' last sound cue is "Overhead the airplanes are zooming and singing,"(NM,III,ii/237) and earlier in the play Fay had proclaimed she and Steve would "sing through any night." (NM,II,iv/160) - but this word has lost its sting since 1935, and must be regarded in 1940 as a sort of automatic insertion on the part of Odets, signifying victory but of a non-specific nature.

This is the conversion of Steve Takis - all his life he was beaten because he did not know how to fight, and was not aware of what he had to struggle against. Now at last he is made to see these things.

> Rosenberger: ...Three days I watched you fighting shadows, so young, so strong in heart. ...use your health to fight, to conquer disease and poverty, dirt and ignorance. Go back to the city, boy and girl.... your wonderful country never needed you more.
>
> (NM,III,ii/236)

And suddenly it happens. Steve gets a spreading wonderful smile" (NM,III,ii/236) and marches off enthusiastically with Fay and Rosenberger, lacking only a white horse and a fanfare of trumpets.

Steve apparently learns that there is a war, that the struggle between the classes does exist. This is what he has to fight against, but he takes no definite sides.

He is asked to fight against "disease and poverty, dirt and ignorance," but Odets, backing away from a Communist ending which should logically follow a realization of the class war and the true cause of society's inequalities, emphasizes rather the struggle itself, and not any particular political impulses it may spring from.[1]

"Fight," then, in 1935, meant for Odets the physical, violent, immediate overthrow of the rich, evil, oppressive powers that be. "Working class, unite and fight! Tear down the slaughter house of our old lives! ...We'll die for what is right!" (WL,I,vii/30-31) "Fight," in 1940, does not seem to imply this at all. The old world must be changed and a new one built, but no plea is made for the total destruction of the old world and a phoenix-like emergence of the new. Rather, Rosenberger - Odets' mouthpiece at the end of the play - suggests alteration within the old system. This is the basic difference between Night Music and the 1935 group, and between it and all the other plays, for that matter: like them all, it condemns society; like them, it advocates a new one; but unlike them, unlike any of them, it looks for reform rather than revolution.

CHAPTER 9

Conclusion

The preceding chapters have attempted to set forth Odets' attitudes toward society as they recur in the successive plays of the 1930's. It remains to be shown that these have a homogeneous continuity throughout, and that they are reflections of attitudes generally held by many people of his time, as they responded to the bewildering social, political and economic struggles of the 1930's.

The main feature of American life, as Odets sees it, is that it is controlled by the capitalist system, which affects the lives of everyone. In such a system the economic class is the unit of social relationship and the basis of social institutions and values. Ownership is separated from labor, private gain is not public gain and production is not based on consumption. Ownership and the means of production is in the hands of a few, and there is a great inequality in the distribution of the benefits of production; therefore such an economy is beneficial to ownership and barbarous to labor. This results in society's being divided into two classes - those who control the means of productivity, the capitalists, and those who labor at production, the masses. The unequal distribution of profits results in a conflict between the two classes, and this antagonistic relationship is the dominant factor in a capitalist society.

The upper class rules and has made the state its tool, to protect the exploiters against the exploited. The upper class, therefore, tries to hide the true situation from the masses.

There is a middle class, Odets admits, but it is chaotic and decaying, and its members will eventually have to take one side or another - Leo Gordon and Sam Katz are both employers in Paradise Lost; Leo "awakens" and joins the masses, Sam remains as he was. There is also a fourth category - the law-breakers - who do not fit into any of the above classes, but they can be described as effects of capitalism, and their evolution discerned in the same way as the others'.

Thus all of society comprises two categories of people - those who have beaten capitalism and those who have been beaten by it.

The main factors which influenced the thought of all these people in the first half of the 1930's, Odets believes, were the Stock Market Crash of 1929, the Depression which followed it and lasted until the advent of World War II, and the success or failure of the different attempts to halt this Depression.[1]

Of the first group, the capitalists run the economic system. Fatt, Fayette and the Hospital Board represent this class in Waiting for Lefty; the Nazis are the capitalistic symbols in Till the Day I Die; Uncle Morty is such in Awake and Sing, Sam Katz and Mr. May in Paradise Lost, Tom Moody and Roxy Gottlieb in Golden Boy,

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1. See Daniel R. Fusfield, The Economic Thought of Franklin Delano Roosevelt and the Origins of the New Deal, (New York, 1956) and Harold L. Ickes, The Secret Diary of Harold Ickes: The First Thousand Days, 1933-1936, (New York, 1953)

Mr. Prince and Willy Wax in Rocket to the Moon, and Mr. George, the avaricious hotelkeeper, in Night Music. These men are the literal or symbolic representatives of capitalism, but it is also represented by its effects upon the people in the plays.

Capitalism, as found in these plays, supports itself only through power, which it has itself created for the purpose of protecting itself, and thus the people of influence in that system have become themselves accustomed to using power whenever they wish to accomplish anything. Harry Fatt in Waiting for Lefty is literally supported by a gunman. Symbolically, the Nazis in Till the Day I Die are supported by troopers; Uncle Morty in Awake and Sing backs up the insensitive insolence of his attitude by the weight of his pocketbook; Siggie, in Golden Boy, can only get his cab and make a reasonable success of himself when Fuseli the gunman buys him an automobile; Tom Moody and Roxy Gottlieb in the same play operate through their connections in the boxing world; and Mr. Prince, like Uncle Morty, impels himself on the power of his bank account.

(The abuse of power is also a comment on the efficacy of capitalism - it cannot survive without such power. Joe Bonaparte in Golden Boy, does not get the big fights he wants until Fuseli uses his influence on Joe's behalf.)

The economic system further affects the characters of its members. Capitalists have become suspicious and distrustful because they themselves are always out to fool someone, and suspect everyone else of wishing to do the same to them; they are

opportunistic because their goal is immediate success at anyone's cost - Mr. Prince, in Rocket to the Moon, was willing to be merciless to his own son-in-law, Stark, and seized the chance to dangle his greater wealth before Cleo as an inducement for her to accept him as a husband rather than Stark; they have learned to use every implement at their control if the occasion demands it because such are the rules according to which business is conducted in America - Sam Katz, in Paradise Lost, cheats his workers and the government, and, when even this fails, is willing to employ a professional incendiary in order to cheat the fire insurance company: they have learned that they must be tough and vicious because society is so - Joe Bonaparte, in Golden Boy must symbolically beat his opponents insensitive to win because it is what the boxing rules and the people's fancy dictate; they must be arrogant, for no one should ever know their real situation - Sam Katz, in Paradise Lost, continually excoriates his wife Bertha for their childless marriage when he himself is really the impotent one; they have conditioned themselves to be insensitive because experience has taught them that business and benevolence do not mix - Uncle Morty in Awake and Sing was not willing to wait even a few days after Jacob's burial before trying to cheat Ralph out of the insurance money due him from Jacob's will; they have learned to demean themselves in order to gain an advantage - Tom Moody, in Golden Boy, was willing to let his beloved Lorna use her wiles on Joe in order to make Joe more of a ring killer; they have adopted the maxim of expediency before all else because their society has shown them that almost no other philosophy works - Fayette in Waiting for Lefty is willing to manufacture

poison gas in order to remain solvent, even knowing that it will be used to kill innocent soldiers. He fires Miller when the latter will not spy for him on another scientist in his employ - capitalism will tolerate no deviants from its code. The capitalists have learned to trust no government because the administrations of that era, led by Presidents Hoover and Roosevelt in that order, were patently unable to cope with the Depression, and when the Roosevelt administration tried, it did so in a "dangerous" socialistic manner. They trust in no bank because they saw the banking system of their country fail in 1934, with their President helpless to stop it.

They trust only in money because it alone brings comfort in 1935. To accumulate money they must exploit their workers to the limits of their capabilities in an effort to extract as much profit from their enterprises as possible. They must keep wages low, spend little on maintenance or the comfort of their workers and cheat wherever the opportunity presents itself. Harry Fatt, in Waiting for Lefty, is a literal example of such tactics when he tries to dominate and disarrange the strike meeting with his gunmen in order to allow the robbing taxi-owners to continue to exploit the cabbies. Sam Katz, in Paradise Lost, does little to make his workers comfortable, gives them small wages and forces them to sign false pay vouchers so he can defraud the government when paying his income tax. His excuse - "How else could we keep open the shop?" (PL,I/185) - is a comment on the inability of capitalism to maintain itself without resorting to subterfuge and oppression.

These patterns of action, attitude and reaction have become, after long conditioning, so strongly imbedded in these people that they are now traits of character which assert themselves not only in business affairs but in personal relations as well - Willy Wax, in Rocket to the Moon, tries to seduce Cleo by pretending he will get her a contract in Hollywood, and Sam Katz, in Paradise Lost is harsh even towards his wife and neighbours.

These are the people who do understand the economic system; so well do they understand it that they practice it with a vengence because it is the only way they know how to succeed. They have accepted financial success as their religion after the Depression had taught them that it is foolish to do otherwise, that financial security is the only security in materialistic America, and they have become hardened, coarse and vicious in their pursuit of it. The conduct of business has sapped all humanity from them to the extent that they are now confirmed in the savagery which once they practised only out of necessity. They have made a virtue of evil; they have become money machines.

Capitalism, aside from ruining the character of capitalists, has many other faults as Odets portrays it. To begin with, it corrupts the masses as well, for they are forced to act savagely and opportunistically themselves in order to be comfortable. Dr. Brenner, in Waiting for Lefty, "an important chemist!" (WL,I,iii/14) uses his talents to manufacture poison gas because that is what his employer wishes; Zeltner, in Till the Day I Die, has turned informer for a fee; Clayton, in the Labor Spy Episode

of Waiting for Lefty, tries to fool his fellow workers into not striking. These men have prostituted their talents and have become ethically perverted.

Capitalism also ruins the morality of all the classes. Hennie, in Awake and Sing, a girl of the lower class, Libby, in Paradise Lost, a girl of the middle class, and Lorna in Golden Boy, presumably moving in the upper class when we meet her, since she is the mistress of the capitalist Moody - all have love affairs before marriage or with men other than their husbands.

Capitalism provides only for the rich; it is not constituted to provide for all its members - Fatt is a literal example in Waiting for Lefty: he is the only one who is fat, or well fed. Uncle Morty in Awake and Sing counts his wealth while his nephew Ralph is impoverished - "all my life I want a pair of black and white shoes and can't get them. It's crazy!" (AS,I/42) Sam Katz in Paradise Lost spends stolen business funds in an effort to regain his sexual potency while his employee's daughter "is not got money for bloomers in gym." (PL,I/185) Mr. Prince, in Rocket to the Moon, wearily plays the Stock Exchange while Phil Cooper must sell his blood to keep himself from absolute poverty.

Capitalism ignores those who can no longer earn[1] - the Little Man in Night Music whom Steve encounters walking a dog in the park builds bridges on paper but is neglected by society.

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1. See Old Age in the Modern World, Report of the Third Congress of the International Association of Gerontology, (London, 1954)

Now that he can no longer provide, he has been tossed aside by a system which guages people solely in terms of their productive or earning power.

Capitalism makes all outside its orbit and approval look cheap, thereby inducing a pursuit of that which it approves. This is what happened to Joe Bonaparte in Golden Boy - his father's home seemed mean and shabby because it lacked the glitter of wealth, and so he sought riches but was corrupted while accumulating it.

Further, since that which it approves cannot be gotten other than through exploitative or illegal methods,capitalism induces exploitation and illegality, producing a cheat like Sam Katz in Paradise Lost or a gangster like Kewpie in the same play, and resulting in the numerous miseries of the exploited masses.

Capitalism oppresses itself as well as the masses, because it gives itself false values, Gus Michaels in Paradise Lost, Siggie in Golden Boy and Tom Moody in the same play, who are on widely separated rungs in the financial ladder, all have the treacherous belief that they need only "a little money" to relieve them of their worries. Gus would start a business, Siggie would buy himself a cab and Moody would bribe his wife into divorce, after which he would settle down with Lorna. They have all been led to believe that happiness can be gained simply through a few hundred or thousand dollars, but this is not so, because no capitalistic success is fulfilling - Mr. Prince in Rocket to the Moon is wealthy but is as frustrated and perhaps more unhappy than his much

poorer son-in-law, Ben. Capitalism cannot make anyone happy because it is unable to - Sam Katz in Paradise Lost is a symbolic representative when he is shown to be impotent and unable to make his wife Bertha happy in love. It is unable to make anyone happy because it hinders the living of a full and free life - Cleo, in Rocket to the Moon, the symbol of those who will live in the new world, rejects Mr. Prince, the symbol of capitalism, because he cannot offer her true love, the symbol of a true life.

Capitalism itself is confused. Captain Schlegel in Till the Day I Die, a symbolic representative of that class, ends in frantic confusion after exhibiting his mastery over Ernst by breaking Ernst's ginger; and in Night Music Mr. Gilbert, the agent of a monstrous Hollywood company, discovers that his company lost sixty thousand dollars in one weekend waiting for two trained monkeys to come from New York when they had two such monkeys on their own lot in California all along.

Lastly, capitalism keeps people unhappy. This can be demonstrated through a series of man-and-woman groupings. Sid and Florrie in Waiting for Lefty, Ernst and Tilly in Till the Day I Die, Myron and Bessie and Ralph and his girl in Awake and Sing, Pearl and Felix, Ben and Libby and Sam and Bertha in Paradise Lost, Lorna and Moody, Lorna and Joe and Anna and Siggie in Golden Boy, Ben and Belle in Rocket to the Moon, and a host of examples in Night Music - the sailor and his girl who are refused a room at the Hotel Algiers and Lily, the pathetic whore who wants to marry one of her clients: all these people have been prevented from enjoying

each other for one of two reasons, both caused by the capitalist system - they either lack sufficient money to embark on a life of their own, or they have been rendered confused or insipid, so that they are unable to live fully.[1]

They are the most obvious examples, but not the only ones. All the people in these plays, except those who become heroes, (i.e., those who awake and join the fight against capitalism,) are doomed to remain unhappy because they have been rendered incapable of action. Thus all of society is unhappy because of the economic system which governs it. Each person has been conditioned by the peace he has made with the system, but no answer other than the revolutionary one leads to the living of a full life; none of these people, therefore, no matter what category they fit into, no matter what bargain they have made with society, are happy. They spend their lives trying to adjust in one way or another to a system which is not able to give anyone peace since all levels of capitalistic success are frustration and unfulfilling. They have all been wasted: Both the rich and the poor are confused; both are incapable of positive action by virtue of this confusion; both are corrupted in character; both have been kept from happiness. Both have been wasted. This is Odets' picture of capitalism.

The lawbreakers break the law for the same reason - it is the only way they believe they can succeed.[1] A tradition of illegality,

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1. See Floyd Dell, Love in the Machine Age, (New York, 1930).

2. For exhaustive studies of lawbreakers in the 1930's see William A. White, Crimes and Criminals, (New York, 1933) especially Chapters 2 and 7, Frank Tannenbaum, Crime and the Community, (New York, 1938) especially Chapters 2,5, and 6 and Thorsten Sellin, Research Memorandum on Crime in the Depression, (New York, 1937).

which can be said to be present in any society, had come into its own during Prohibition. Great numbers of peoples had been involved in the smuggling, manufacturing and selling of liquor, and these people had to shift their attention to other fields when the Volstead Act was repealed early in the Depression. Racketeers began to enter other areas of business - unions began to be gangster-controlled, extortionists became prevalent, etc. For a young man nurtured on want, accustomed to fight for every advantage or get none, gangsterism seemed a logical way for one to prosper. American society was at war, and they were simply joining the winning side. They could see about them the results achieved by those who attempted to succeed through the normal channels - an army of homeless migrants wandering across the country in search of jobs and of security; the ugly and depressing sight of "Hoover-villes," ramshackle colonies growing like fungus on the outskirts of cities, lived in by jobless, hungry, illclothed people; laborers working for starvation wages and having to endure the insults and pettiness of those above them; "He wants me to drive a cab and submit to the brutalities of foremen all my life." (GB,I,ii/246) white collar workers slaving without progress for years, becoming colorless cogs in a machine which does not care or adequately provide for them. Thus it was quite natural for many young men, bred in poverty-ridden areas, seeing only gangsters and owners riding in big cars and spending big money, to become gangsters themselves. Harry Fatt in Waiting for Lefty is the first of the type one encounters; Schlegel,

the Nazi captain in Till the Day I Die, is a symbolic counterpart to Fatt. Moe Axelrod is the gangster in Awake and Sing, Kewpie in Paradise Lost and Eddie Fuseli, who learned to carry a gun in World War I and symbolically has never put it down in peacetime, is such a person in Golden Boy. These people, more aggressive than their neighbours, took matters into their own hands when they faced a Depression society which offered them little opportunity or hope for normal advance.

The beaten ones, the masses, were confused.[1] They did not understand the system and thus they could not win over it. To a nation which had to face the bewildering series of events occurring during the years 1928 to 1936, the presence of such confusion is not difficult to understand. In 1928 America was riding at the peak of what seemed to be a permanently rising prosperity. The Stock Market Crash of 1929 did not destroy simply the value of a few million shares; it destroyed the faith of the American People in their economic system, which meant in their whole way of life. They saw their President totally incapable of halting the Depression which followed the Stock Market Crash. They saw the legislatures of their country helpless before the crumbling economic system; and when Roosevelt came along with his bright-sounding words they looked upon him as a saviour until he too proved fallible, and economic disaster and personal hardship

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1. See Sherwood Anderson, Puzzled America, (New York, 1935)

began to appear as inevitable as had that earlier prosperity.[1]

People were confused because capitalism offered false values. The normal avenues of success it recommended, which should give each man a chance not only to earn a living but to be comfortable and able to enjoy the fruits of the country's vast and assorted production, proved not to be so; hard work and thrift enabled men barely to get along, but did not allow them to live lives approaching any sort of luxury as had been promised. Jobs became harder to find and did not pay enough; many became migrants, homeless and jobless; many struggled on a bare subsistence wage. These people were beaten because the ideals which capitalism had offered them to live by had proved treacherous, and the system itself was failing right before their very eyes.

They could not be aware that something was wrong with their lives, but they did not know how to right things because capitalism had made sure that the people under its control were incapable of perceiving the true cause of its defects; thus capitalism offered no target at which the downtrodden could aim, and thus the downtrodden continued to remain miserable and confused.

People reacted in different ways. Some grew resigned to their situation because they felt they could do little about it. They lost ambition and hope and became insipid, apathetic ciphers in a system they did not even have the energy to hate. Ben and Belle Stark of Night Music best exemplify this.

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1. For a full treatment of the plight of the American family see Winona L. Morgan, The Family Meets the Depression, (Minneapolis, 1939) What the American Family Faces, Leland Foster Wood and John W. Mullen, eds., (Chicago, 1943) and Samuel Stouffer, Research Memorandum on the Family in the Depression, (N.Y. 1937)

Ten years of patient wage-earning, with no conception of the overall picture they were in, left them moving restlessly in a colorless existence of which they had been inured to demand little. In each play there is an example of such people - Joe, temporarily, in Waiting for Lefty, Myron and Bessie and Sam Feinschreiber in Awake and Sing, Clara and the Homeless Men in Paradise Lost, Mr. Carp and Lorna in Golden Boy, (and Anna in the same play, who wants no more than she has,) Frenchy in Rocket to the Moon and Steve, temporarily, in Night Music.

Others became backward-looking. They could not abide the harsh present and so turned their minds to what seemed to them to be a more pleasant past. This is a form of escape rather than resignation, but is equally ineffective at achieving permanent results. Gus Michaels in Paradise Lost continually prattles of times gone by, Myron Berger in Awake and Sing remembers longingly the era of Teddy Roosevelt, and even Tom Moody, at one point, recalls when New York "used to be a gorgeous town....you couldn't go to sleep..." (GB,I,i/238)

Some turned away from reality and sought beauty, something permanent to hold on to in a world of shifting and treacherous values. Sam Feinschreiber in Awake and Sing is such a man - a life of constant humiliation and failure has made him turn to that which does not mock and abuse him.

Others become cautious. A long schooling in adversity crushed all hope out of them, and they sought now only to preserve whatever has been left to them. They had no desire to make

things better, only to see that things did not get worse. The women are the outstanding examples - Bessie in Awake and Sing, Clara in Paradise Lost, Lorna in Golden Boy[1] and Belle in Rocket to the Moon. Each of these women is willing to sacrifice a chance at improvement in order to guarantee the status quo - Bessie keeps Ralph away from his girl and Belle dissuades her husband from accepting Prince's offer of backing for a new office in a new district. This character type has several male manifestations as well - Irv, in the Sid and Florrie episode of Waiting for Lefty, does not want to let Sid come to see his sister Florrie for the same reason that Bessie kept Ralph's girl away from the Berger house because the lovers were penniless and their marriage would be sure to result in a life full of hatreds, antagonisms, and frustration. Mr. Carp, in Golden Boy, is precisely the same type, inured through long adversity to be cynical, distrustful and hopeful of nothing. Mr. Tucker in Night Music is another such person - he wants Fay to come home where it is safe and predictable, and she must break away from his influence, before she can advance.

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1. Lorna is not literally cautious, as is Bessie or Clara, but her hesitancy to enter into a love-affair with Joe - "You make me feel too human, Joe. All I want is peace and quiet, not love. I'm a tired old lady, Joe, and I don't mind being what you call 'half dead.' In fact its what I like....The twice I was in love I took an awful beating and I don't want it again!" (GB,II,ii/284) - is symbolic, since, as has been pointed out in the chapter on Rocket to the Moon, love is Odets' symbol for life itself, and so Lorna's hesitancy is symbolically similar to Bessie's and Clara's.

Others took the easy way out. Conditioned to compromise, to the philosophy that one must do a favor to receive a favor, they have become sycophants, yes-men. Adolph in Till the Day I Die is such a person, as is Feley's nephew Milton in Paradise Lost, Gilbert's nephew Arnold in Night Music, and Ben Stark himself, in Rocket to the Moon, who has become an unknowing yes-man to his wife.

They are willing to demean themselves in order to get along. There are other easy ways out. Sid's brother Sam, in the Sid and Florrie scene of Waiting for Lefty, has joined the Navy. Roy Brown, in Night Music, wishes to join the Army, and even Steve in the same play looks upon the Armed Forces as his last resort when he has been fired at the airport. To them the Army or Navy stands for ready-made comfort - if offers food, clothing, shelter and an ideology which one needs only to accept. No thinking is required, no problems have to be solved, no one need to be bitter or confused or beaten; one need only follow orders.

This is intellectual suicide; some may prefer actual physical suicide as the best way out, as did Joe Bonaparte in Golden Boy, and Major Duhring in Till the Day I Die. Some attempt moral suicide, as did all the confused young girls who entered into love affairs. Sid's leaving Florrie in Waiting for Lefty and Felix's leaving of Pearl in Paradise Lost are also forms of moral suicide in that both these men gave up and went away, rather than staying on to fight.

Others sought ways to escape, and, since they did not fully understand the economic system, (they understood only that it

oppressed them,) their attempts at escape manifested themselves as rather silly or disastrous undertakings.

Succession of bewildered girls sought escape through illicit love-affairs. In order, they are Florrie, in Waiting for Lefty, who, if she did not sleep with Sid, still offered herself to him - "Sid, I'll go with you - we'll get a room somewhere," (WL,I,iv/21) Hennie in Awake and Sing, Libby in Paradise Lost, Lorna in Golden Boy, Cleo in Rocket to the Moon and Fay in Night Music. Each of these girls submitted to their seducers for much the same reasons - the affair itself was a way of escaping the monotony of existence, they sought something perfect in an imperfect world, and in some cases the men themselves were successful in the business world in a dynamic or illegal but nevertheless exciting way, and so an affair with them was a voyage into another, more exhilarating sphere.

For others, who realized their misery but saw no way to overcome it, but yet hated it because they knew it should not be, their confusion resulted in a yearning for many things and a frustration when these things could not be had, and, more basically, when the yearning could not in any way be satisfied, since these people were not fully aware of what it was they really wanted. This created misdirected antagnoisms which only seethed in their own gall, since their origins were not fully understood. These people were afflicted with a sense of unfulfillment which they could not overcome, and so they became bitter. Joe, in Waiting for Lefty, is such a person, as are Miller and Sid and Dr. Benjamin in the same play. Ernst and Carl carry on the pattern

in Till the Day I Die, Ralph does so in Awake and Sing, Ben and Felix in Paradise Lost, Joe Bonaparte in Golden Boy, Cleo and Cooper in Rocket to the Moon and Steve in Night Music. All the heroes come from this category except Leo Gordon of Paradise Lost - they are the bitter ones who "learn", and only then can they take positive action.

All these people desire to be good. This is evident in the lower class characterizations where the oppressed seek only the freedom to live peacefully where "the world is supposed to be for all of us." (WL,I,ii/10/ The middle class seek more or less the same ends, as exemplified in the wishes of Leo Gordon in Paradise Lost and Ben Stark and Phil Cooper in Rocket to the Moon. They desire simply enough money to be free of naggling worry, in order to be able to pursue their more intimate interests. This is repeated symbolically in the lives of Carl and Ernst Tausig, who wish to go back to their music - something perfect and unaffected by monetary values. Tom Moody, the capitalist in Golden Boy, wants a little money to bribe his wife into divorce so that he may marry Lorna and live quietly. Even the lawbreakers want to play the game according to the rules - Kewpie, in Paradise Lost, wipes off the spit with a silk handkerchief after Ben Gordon had ejaculated upon his own Olympic statue, and Eddie Fuseli in Golden Boy wants to own a piece of Joe without remuneration - "I don't care for no profit.... But I like a good fighter; I like a good boy who could win the crown." (GB,II,i/278) These men, evil as they are, yet wish to create or maintain beautiful ideals which they can admire, ideals untainted by the harsh reality they themselves move in. Thus the desires of all people, no matter their

category, is to live by the rules and be at peace with one another, Odets says. They are prevented from doing so by the capitalist system, which induces people to be savage and contrary to their basic instincts.

The capitalist system, therefore, must be abolished. The class concept implies the struggle between the dominant and exploited classes, but it also implies change as well as stress. Change must occur on a class level, as no other type of change will succeed. All those who are not fighting for the upper class must unify to fight against it. Since the upper class will not surrender willingly, the lower classes can only persevere through force. They must seize control of the state and abolish capitalism.

To do this they must be aware of what they have to do; they must be made class-conscious, only after which will they be able to act, for only then will they have understood the structure of their class economy and society, and only then can they know how best to deal with it. This is the Marxist argument.

It is Odets', for Odets does not simply portray the class struggle as it manifests itself in the lives, aspirations and antagonisms of the rich and the poor; he carefully details or implies a way to abolish this struggle. In each play the message is similar. Waiting for Lefty pictures exploitation and calls for a violent war against "the bosses;" Till the Day I Die pictures such a war symbolically; Awake and Sing shows Ralph Berger, the representative of the lower class, becoming aware of the true structure of his society and deciding to educate his fellow workers so that all of labour will unite in one fight against capitalism; Paradise Lost

shows Leo Gordon, the representative of the middle class, realizing that his class is chaotic and dying, and deciding, as Ralph did, to join in the fight against the upper classes. Golden Boy, while not containing a hero who awakes and decides to fight, pictures the gradual corruption of a man by capitalistic success to a point where he suddenly realizes what has happened to him but is too far deteriorated to be able to join Ralph and Leo. Rocket to the Moon again pictures the awakening, symbolically, of Cleo, a lower class heroine, (and of a middle class hero - Ben Stark?,) and Night Music, the last play in the series, returns to the pattern set by Waiting for Lefty and Awake and Sing by picturing the enlightenment of Steve and Fay, a pair of lower class protagonists. In each case the message is the same, although the means recommended for achieving the desired results may vary throughout the plays.

Thus the lower classes are confused, beaten, bitter, unhappy and wasted. The middle class is confused, chaotic, unhappy and wasted. The upper class is evil, corrupted, unhappy and wasted. Man aspires to be good, to be whole spiritually and physically, and only Communism can offer such a life. Communism can only be achieved through concerted action; therefore, everyone in society must strive to overthrow the capitalist system and institute Communism. This is the general content of Odets' message throughout his plays.

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