

## **Supplemental Material for *American Socialist Triptych: The Literary-Political Work of Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Upton Sinclair, and W.E.B. Du Bois* by Mark Van Wienen**

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**Introduction, page 11: “Perhaps the most in sync with the triptych writers, and perhaps the most implacable critic of the linguistic and psychological turns of recent ‘radical’ theory, is the Marxist-feminist literary theorist Teresa Ebert.”**

Teresa Ebert’s socialist-feminist theoretical work comprises a kind of corollary to the historical and critical work being done on Communists in the 1930s, insofar as she lays out in the clearest theoretical terms the implications of embracing Marxist historical materialism and revolutionism. In her major work to date, *Ludic Feminism and After: Postmodernism, Desire, and Labor in Late Capitalism*, Ebert argues that nearly all postmodernist and poststructuralist theories make the classic idealist error of believing material relations are the effect rather than the cause of ideas. The error, she suggests, not only leads us to imagine that various forms of “radical” thought appear to have revolutionary potential when, in fact, they do little more than validate the status of intellectuals as “privileged mental workers”; it also contributes to the erasure, in most purportedly “radical” theories, of basic distinctions between material needs and immaterial desires. Thereby, Ebert concludes, “Lack and need become superfluous concepts and, as such, have to be erased: this is a world (class) for which the problem is no longer the problem of poverty (need) but of liberty (desire)” (57).

Gilman, Sinclair, and Du Bois (as well as their Communist comrades) would largely concur with Ebert, as all repeatedly insisted both upon the importance of economics and upon economic equality as the preeminent goal of any campaign for social justice. All affirmed the Marxist and socialist traditions insisting that the root of most forms of social injustice lies in economic inequality. So long as human life is sustained by the satisfaction of material necessities—the food, shelter, and clothing that sustains life, the sexual relations that are not merely the satisfaction of desire but the means to reproduce life—and these necessities in turn

are produced through manipulation of the physical world as orchestrated through human social relations, I can see no reason to argue against Ebert's premise, shared by the triptych writers, that makes these material necessities primary, antecedent to the desires that might consequently spring from human life once thus sustained by material production and social relations.

But other classic Marxist positions held by Ebert do not automatically follow from the primacy of the economic base and the fundamental fact of economic exploitation. Ebert assumes not only the necessity of complete economic transformation but also the efficacy of such a transformation to overcome all social ills, and for the sake of the transformation, she accepts practically any form of political action as ethically acceptable, up to and including armed insurrection. On these points, Ebert lays bare key assumptions of the Comintern and the Communist Party, USA, in the 1930s, which even as they preached an antiracist and antisexist line envisaged the overthrow of capitalism as the sufficient as well as necessary condition of general social liberation. In Ebert's case, one of the moments in her argument where such assumptions are revealed is her account of Bhuvaneswari Bhaduri, a teen-aged participant in a clandestine revolutionary group in 1920s India who committed suicide rather than carrying out her assigned task of political assassination. Rather than considering, say, the coerciveness of the cultural and personal pressures brought to bear upon Bhuvaneswari that left her no option but to kill her mark or to kill herself, Ebert wonders instead which "historical subjectivities and knowledges [. . .] would enable her to intervene to transform the economic and political relations of imperialism—that would enable her, in short, to participate in the armed struggle of the anticolonial struggle" (293). For most of their careers, this was not a position that Gilman, Sinclair, and Du Bois could endorse, although they certainly knew and sometimes maintained ties with militants who were willing to commit violence for the sake of anticapitalist and

anticolonial struggle. While the triptych writers would concur with Ebert on the necessity of complete transformation, only Sinclair could possibly agree with her that the triumph of the proletariat would inevitably bring the end of all social ills, and all three struggled mightily against their doctrinaire Marxist colleagues who rationalized and even sought out a violent response to the injustices of capitalism. As socialists of the Second Internationale, Gilman, Sinclair, and Du Bois maintained that these hierarchies could be challenged within existing political institutions, at least within their American context. Indeed, they were inclined toward the position that only by nonviolent means was there any hope of achieving lasting, genuine social equality.

**Introduction, page 18: “that history may tell us of both the potentials for progressive transformation and the pitfalls of attempting such a transformation in the opening years of the twenty-first century.”**

In the closing days of the 2008 presidential election, Republican candidate John McCain and his allies turned to a decidedly old-fashioned but historically effective charge against their opponent, then-candidate Barack Obama. Obama, so it was said, is a “socialist”; his policies amount to “socialism.” At the time, the anti-socialist gambit seemed like little more than the final thrash of McCain’s sinking campaign. When an Orlando television anchor asked Biden, “How is Senator Obama not being a Marxist if he intends to spread the wealth around?” Biden was incredulous: “Are you joking?” At a rally on October 29, 2008, Obama warned mock-seriously that next his opponents would be saying he showed his true communist colors way back in elementary school by sharing toys, or letting a friend have his peanut-butter-and-jelly sandwich (Sherman; Gavrilovic). Yet in spite of their satirical manner, Obama and Biden’s well-orchestrated public response suggests how concerned they were about the accusation of socialism. Indeed, that mockery was their rhetorical weapon of choice, more a good offense than a serious defense, may indicate how close to home the charges hit. The furor over Obama’s supposed socialism was catalyzed, after all, not with the inventions of Republicans but with remarks made by Obama himself to Joe “The Plumber” Wurzelbacher. Obama’s statements, plucked from a report by an Ohio television station and trumpeted by McCain in the final debate of the 2008 campaign, did have a discernibly socialist twang: “I think that when you spread the wealth around,” Obama concluded, “it’s good for everybody” (qtd. Hertzberg).

Even as Obama worked in his first term, with decidedly uncertain results, to orchestrate recovery from the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression, cries of socialism continued to broil. Critics on the far right, particularly, continued to keep red-baiting rhetoric alive in

public discourse. On Inauguration Day, Rush Limbaugh announced, “I Hope Obama Fails,” explaining that “what he’s talking about is the absorption of as much of the private sector by the US government as possible, from the banking business, to the mortgage industry, the automobile business, to health care” (“Limbaugh”). The anti-Obama, anti-socialist drumbeat was less insistent from Republican party regulars, yet their recourse to labeling their opponents “socialist” was frequent enough to suggest its utility when the occasion is right. At the outset of debate over Obama’s first budget, for example, House Republican leader John Boehner opined that it represented “one big down payment on a new American socialist experiment.” Also in the spring of 2009, members of the Republican National Committee introduced a resolution asking that the Democratic party change its name to the “Democratic Socialist” party, which was rejected in favor of another “recogniz[ing] that the Democratic Party is dedicated to restructuring American society along [sic] socialist ideals” (Cornwell and Ferraro; Orr).

In his first presidential campaign, Obama did distinguish himself by becoming the first successful presidential candidate since Lyndon B. Johnson to run *for* rather than against the legacy of Roosevelt’s New Deal. This hardly makes him a socialist, however, any more than Roosevelt and Johnson were socialists. Obama belongs to a progressive and liberal tradition of American economic and political thought, greatly advanced and partly realized through Roosevelt’s New Deal, that has accepted private ownership of industry as necessary while seeking alternatives to *laissez-faire* economics, individualistic ideology, and inequitable distribution of wealth. This progressive (and capitalistic) tradition *has* drawn from socialist and social democratic ideas, even as its practitioners have typically renounced, denounced, or been unaware of their sources.

But the real news to emerge from a clear analysis of socialism in the United States is not

Obama's left-of-center liberalism, but the degree to which socialistic political philosophy and practice are nowadays far from being extreme or radical. Anti-government Republicans may speak of privatizing Social Security, but even among them, the assumption that every American should enjoy years of "retirement" free from material want remains sacrosanct; and insofar as their schemes seem to undermine precisely this expectation, neither the politicians nor their privatization plans have yet been widely embraced. In a shrewd piece published during the 2008 campaign, *New Yorker* journalist Hendrick Hertzberg recalls that in the 2000 Republican presidential primaries candidate McCain had seemed to know something about progressive—and regressive—tax policies. Pressed by a participant at a town-hall meeting who felt that high tax rates levied upon her father, a doctor, were unfair—"Are we getting closer and closer to, like, socialism and stuff?"--McCain showed that he (then, at least) understood the importance of government policies, including the minutiae of tax codes, not as a neutral arbiter of economic fair play but as an active protector of the riches of the already-rich: "the very wealthy, because they can afford tax lawyers and all kinds of loopholes, really don't pay nearly as much as you think they do" (Hertzberg). Hertzberg observes as well the social democratic underpinnings of Alaska policies overseen by then-governor Sarah Palin—however unconscious she may have been of this when she engaged in the shrillest red-baiting of the 2008 campaign. Before she was a candidate for vice president of the United States, the Alaska governor boasted that the oil-lease dividend distributed to all Alaska residents yearly, which Palin had been able to increase by some \$1,200 for the previous year, represented a favorable political-economic arrangement: "We're set up, unlike other states in the union, where it's collectively Alaskans own the resources. So we share in the wealth when the development of those resources occurs."

The question of how American politics and culture have reached this peculiar juncture is



a central concern of *American Socialist Triptych*. The book considers our national phobias about socialism, our wide-ranging trepidation about the socialization of the production and distribution of our wealth—which, in truth, is one of the fundamental modern conditions of its creation. Even more, it is a study of how and when socialist ideas and practices came to be mainstream, part of the relatively unexamined *lingua franca* of our political life and part of our public expectation to have a final say about how the business of the nation is conducted. If my emphasis falls upon the latter point, it is only because both contemporary and historical accounts of our politics and culture tend to focus upon our allegiance to capitalism, and—still more crucially—because a lack of recognition of our already-achieved industrial socialization is more likely to retard than to stimulate further progress toward public control of the common wealth and social equality. For one of the key arguments against socialism all along has been that its ideals are admirable enough, even beautiful, but that in application they are unrealistic, or just plain monstrous.

**Chapter 1, page 27: “The United States had, after all, been a site of various communal experiments in cooperative and egalitarian economics since the beginnings of European settlement.”**

Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Upton Sinclair, W. E. B. Du Bois, and most of their American socialist comrades were strongly inclined to embrace many of the various movements, traditions, and ideas that might be called socialistic as well as those that are definitely socialist. After all, although a full articulation of socialism as today we understand it is a phenomenon primarily of the last two hundred years, the ideal of social equality goes back to the very beginnings of human culture, and socialists have been keen to claim that legacy. Upton Sinclair’s *The Cry for Justice: An Anthology of the Literature of Social Protest*, published in 1916, made just this claim on its title page: “The writings of philosophers, poets, novelists, social reformers, and others who have voiced the struggle against social injustice, selected from twenty-five languages, covering a period of five-thousand years.” Along with excerpts from American anarchists and widely recognized socialists, Sinclair made selections for his anthology from contemporary but non-socialist authors such as James Russell Lowell, Vachel Lindsay, and Katharine Lee Bates, and from a still more startling assemblage of historical figures: Isaiah and half a dozen other Hebrew prophets, Plato and Plutarch, Aristotle and Aristophanes, Shakespeare, Otto von Bismarck, Thomas Jefferson, and Abraham Lincoln. Some quotations, from Jefferson for example, offer the kind of general anti-authoritarian sentiments that might be appropriated to many a cause. Other quotations, however, point strongly to the currency of socialistic, if not certainly socialist, ideas in the United States stretching well back into the nineteenth century—and at the seat of highest political power. Lincoln’s statements upon the priority of labor over capital, for instance, reveal the most acclaimed of presidents articulating elements of the labor theory of value in an 1847 statement

on tariffs: “Inasmuch as most good things are produced by labor, it follows that all such things ought to belong to those whose labor has produced them.” Sinclair’s quotation of Lincoln concludes with what amounts to an apt summary of the theme of Sinclair’s collection: “[I]t has happened in all ages of the world that some have labored, and others, without labor, have enjoyed a large proportion of the fruits. This is wrong, and should not continue. To secure to each laborer the whole product of his labor as nearly as possible is a worthy object of any good government” (623).

Eclectic socialists such as Sinclair were not by any means the only ones reaching back so far for socialistic precedents, nor the only ones poking into specifically American political traditions. Both the communal practices and the larger governmental structures of the Iroquois confederation were admired by Friedrich Engels as well as the American ethnologist and Social Darwinian Lewis Henry Morgan. In spite of his subsequent reputation as ethnocentric, Morgan championed the rights of the contemporary Iroquois, or Hotinonshonni, and was a keen admirer of the egalitarianism of their culture: “their whole civil policy [is] averse to the concentration of power in the hands of any single individual, but inclined to the opposite principle of division among a number of equals” (qtd. Wilson 105). As a matter of fact, the Hotinonshonni confederation, with its system of republican government and emphasis upon consensus, was not only impressive to revolutionary socialists and others avowedly interested in socialistic ideals. The confederation provided an indigenous American model for the U.S. constitutional balance between federal powers and states’ rights as well as the division of powers between branches of government (see Johansen, esp. chap. 2). If, on the one hand, the adaptability of Hotinonshonni practices to a variety of ideological viewpoints suggests plainly that there is nothing intrinsically socialist or socialistic about them (any more than the presidency of

Abraham Lincoln as a whole might be thought of in such terms), the egalitarian aims and anti-hegemonic implications of those practices, on the other hand, point just as definitely to the mixture of competing ideals at the founding of the U.S. republic. It might give us pause to realize that Benjamin Franklin, another admirer of the Hotinonshonni as well as an inspiration to many an American capitalist entrepreneur, drew from Native American practices in offering a spectacularly narrow definition of “natural” rights to personal property, and a correspondingly broad definition of public property: “All property, indeed, except the savage’s temporary cabin, his bow, his matchcoat and other little Acquisitions absolutely necessary for his Subsistence, seems to me to be the creature of public Convention. Hence, the public has the rights of regulating Descents, and all other Conveyances of Property, and even of limiting the quantity and uses of it” (qtd. Johansen, 104-105).

Notwithstanding the efforts of the nation’s founders to institutionalize checks to the popular will and to perpetuate slavery, their revolutionary example was acclaimed by a great many socialists, asserted by them to provide an important precedent for what they hoped to accomplish in U.S. democratic government. The founders had, after all, overthrown an autocratic government—a kind of government later nineteenth-century socialists certainly saw as having reemerged in the collusion of politics with capitalist business. In place of autocracy, they had established a form of representative democracy. So why not use that form of popular self-government, the socialists reasoned, to overthrow the one great obstacle to its full realization, industrial autocracy? The founders, in the process of justifying their break from traditional authority, had articulated certain radical ideals that had always threatened to outrun and undo the system of checks and balances by which they had sought to establish themselves as the ruling elite. A number of the founders had asserted the equality of all people regardless

of social rank and, furthermore, the right of the people to institute new forms of government whenever the old forms ceased to reflect their interests. And was it not in the people's interest, socialists asserted, to make their very means of material support responsive to their direction instead of being controlled by private persons for those persons' own personal use?

**Chapter 1, page 28: “Nathaniel Hawthorne, who lived in the Brook Farm cooperative community supported by Ralph Waldo Emerson and other Transcendentalists, made the community a matter for satiric and tragic fiction in *The Blithedale Romance*.”**

Part of the experience of communal socialism in the United States has been that the power of a hostile capitalist environment made the long-term survival of communal socialist groups doubtful from the outset. Other schemes and movements sought to address this weakness specifically by postulating the need for instituting socialist practices on a much wider scale than the individual plantation or village. The latter-day reputation of the communal socialists has suffered, too, by the powerful intellectual antagonists through whom their story has come down to us. Their foremost detractors, already noted, were Marx and Engels, for whom Fourierism and Owenism were too far divorced from the material realities of the class struggle. Among canonical American authors, William Bradford was not alone in his realist redaction of the egalitarian, communistic ideal. The best-known account of the nineteenth-century communes is Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *Blithedale Romance*, whose narrator’s professed sympathy for the communitarian socialist project is rendered moot by the apparently final verdict of history:

[H]ow fair, in that first summer, appeared the prospect that it might endure for generations, and be perfected, as the ages rolled away, into the system of a people, and a world. [. . .] More and more, I feel that we had struck upon what ought to be a truth. Posterity may dig it up, and profit by it. The experiment, so far as its original projectors were concerned, proved long ago a failure, first lapsing into Fourierism, and dying, as it well deserved, for this infidelity to its own higher spirit. Where once we toiled with our hopeful hearts, the town-paupers, aged, nerveless, and disconsolate, creep sluggishly afield. Alas, what faith is requisite to bear up against such results of generous effort! (245-46)

Recognized, both in Hawthorne's time and since, as a fictionalized representation of the Brook Farm community at which Hawthorne and a number of other members of Emerson's Transcendentalist Club were founding residents, Blithedale signifies by its very name an idealism too ethereal—or vacuous—for realization among mere human mortals.

But though the Brook Farm commune was defunct by the time Hawthorne wrote *The Blithedale Romance* in 1851, his narrator Coverdale's account of its demise both truncates its story and rather unfairly impugns the Fourierites who took over the colony in 1843. Founded in 1841 with the leadership of several members of the Boston Transcendentalist club, the participation of Margaret Fuller, and the blessing of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Brook Farm nevertheless became economically viable for a time only *after* the Fourierite take-over. In 1844, the first full year operating under Fourierite principles, the community for the first time earned a small profit even while, as historian Brian Berry argues, developing a "more democratic system of labor" and seeking more intentionally "to correct the ills of wage labor" than had the original commune in which the Transcendentalists were conspicuous in leadership roles (102, 103). To be sure, the ideals of the communal socialist movement were largely congruent with those of Transcendentalism (Francis). In literary history, we might readily assert that Transcendentalism, the very root of the American Renaissance and thus of American literature as a self-consciously national tradition, owes far more to the egalitarian roots of communitarian socialism than to the increasingly hierarchical development of American mercantile capitalism. Once we get past the cunning misrepresentation of Hawthorne's *Blithedale Romance*, we can recognize also that communal socialism was both broader than the "generous effort" of the Brook Farm Transcendentalists and more practically successful than Hawthorne and his Transcendentalist colleagues were able to make it.

**Chapter 1, page 30: “This was exactly the contention of Laurence Gronlund’s 1884 book, *The Cooperative Commonwealth*, which in fact drew heavily upon Marx and Engels’s ideas and even turns of phrase.”**

*The Cooperative Commonwealth*, the 1884 treatise by Danish-born immigrant Laurence Gronlund, was the single most important English-language book for introducing Marxism to American readers. In many respects, Gronlund read the American situation in ways clearly parallel to Marx and Engels’s interpretation of the European one. Similar to the Commune, for example, is the “rising of the workingmen in July 1877,” which was “The first revolt of American white slaves against their task-masters!” (244). Moreover, just as Marx saw the Commune as the beginning of revolutionary action, which would undoubtedly spread and deepen through the inexorable process of capitalist accumulation and labor exploitation, Gronlund predicted that the uprising of 1877 was only the beginning of an inevitable cycle of revolution in the United States, as time and again capitalist overproduction would lead to economic crisis, economic crisis to labor unrest, and unrest to increasingly brutal suppression, until “in the fulness of time we shall have a labor revolt that will not be put down” (245).

Gronlund’s account is so thoroughly Marxist that at a number of key points his rhetoric unmistakably echoes that of Marx and Engels. Gronlund, for example, proclaims the inevitable fall of capitalism in the following terms: “This ‘Individualism,’ which has created and nourished Capital and is making it bigger and bigger, is at the same time digging the grave of Capital” (63). These lines evoke one of the best-known passages in the *Manifesto*: “The development of Modern Industry, therefore, cuts from under its feet the very foundation on which the bourgeoisie produces and appropriates products. What the bourgeoisie, therefore, produces, above all, is its own grave-diggers. Its fall and the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable” (Marx and Engels, 483). With equal assurance, Gronlund concludes,



“Socialists might simply fold their arms and calmly wait for [capitalism’s] dissolution” (63).

Yet it is precisely at the moment of declaring the historical, dialectical materialist triumph of socialism across the board, at the very point where Gronlund’s argument and his rhetoric aligns most closely with the *Manifesto* and with Engels’s dogmatic *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, that Gronlund’s argument begins to turn against itself. Gronlund’s conception of the Marxist tradition continues to hold with utter seriousness its claim to scientific, empirical validity. But, paradoxically, it is Gronlund’s fidelity to empirical accuracy and scientific demonstration that leads him *away from* orthodox revolutionary Marxism. Once historical and material forces have established the direction of social change, Gronlund imagines a tipping point at which the majority of citizens will acknowledge the inevitability of that change, approve of its results, and so give it their democratic assent: “As soon as the people learn not to be scared by the word ‘Socialism;’ as soon as they learn the true nature of the State and see whither they are drifting, the Cooperative Commonwealth will be the only *expedient* system” (93).

In an important sense, Gronlund’s position aligns closely with that of Engels in *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, which stresses both the power of historical forces and the possibility of channeling those forces—to a limited extent—by conscious direction: “Active social forces work exactly like natural forces: blindly, forcibly, destructively, so long as we do not understand, and reckon with, them. But when once we understand them, when once we grasp their action, their direction, their effects, it depends only upon ourselves to subject them more and more to our own will, and by means of them to reach our own ends” (712). The key difference between Gronlund and many other Marxist thinkers is that Gronlund insisted that in the United States, at least, historical and structural forces might permit revolutionary political

action to avoid violence. Indeed, Gronlund's notion that "fears" might be overcome and "the people" at large embrace socialism gestures unmistakably to the kinds of hope for social democracy through the existing parliamentary and legal channels that Engels himself occasionally countenanced during the Second International (some Marxists would say, at a moment of weakness) (see Tucker, "Introduction," xxxiv-xxxv). Gronlund's characterization of the socialists, too, points to an inter-class coalition that would undermine the necessity of all-out class warfare, as Gronlund hails "resolute men and women, intelligent representatives of all classes, who are determined to lead the world into new channels!" (234).

**Chapter 3, page 105: “Whether or not Gilman was directly influential upon Garland’s views on gender, the two shared essentially the same convictions on the subject.”**

Garland’s *Rose of Dutcher’s Coolly*, which appeared in 1895 and is considered by most critics Garland’s best full-length novel, follows almost exactly the paradigm for women’s social and economic independence that Gilman spelled out in her speeches of the early 1890s. While Garland’s representation of the upper Midwest is consistently bleak, he does idealize one aspect of its life: the freedom from strict gender codes that his heroine, Rose, experiences in her rural childhood. Whereas Gilman describes the dismal social reality of young girls being discouraged from physical exercise but urged to “act pretty,” Garland locates in the childhood experiences of his heroine, Rose, a physical freedom virtually indistinguishable from that of the boys. Indeed, her activity is remarked upon as gendered largely to the extent that it blatantly challenges the received gender norms: “Through it all she grew tall and straight and brown. [. . . ] The boys respected her as a girl who wasn’t afraid of bugs, and who could run, and throw a ball. Above all she was strong and well” (21).

Unlike other turn-of-the-century fictional heroines—Crane’s Maggie, Dreiser’s Carrie—Rose’s physical precociousness does not pave the way for sexual precociousness, even when she leaves the farm and moves first to Madison, Wisconsin, and then to Chicago—the latter, of course, Sister Carrie’s first big city after coming off the farm. Rose’s refusal to commit herself too soon to marriage or other entangling relationships with men depends significantly upon the tutelage of older, successful professional women: a lawyer from Milwaukee, a college professor in Madison, a physician of Chicago. These women play, in effect, the role that Gilman implicitly urged upon her audiences in the 1890s, when she bid them to educate their daughters in the sexual, legal, and social facts of marriage. Moreover, as in Gilman, Garland’s professional women model not merely discretion in sexual matters but also economic

independence. In a discussion with her “spiritual sister,” Isabel, who is pursuing a career in medicine, Rose expresses her disgust with the conventions of romance and marriage: ““I hate to think of marrying for a home, and I hate to think of marrying as a profession. Writers accuse us [women] of thinking of nothing else, and I get sick and tired of the whole thing. I wish I was just a plain animal or had no sex at all”” (327-28).

**Chapter 3, page 123: “Here Gilman’s autobiography kicks into Horatio Alger, up-by-the-bootstraps mode . . . .”**

The debts and poverty of the 1890s are treated at some length in Gilman's *Living* as well as in her *Diaries*, though Gilman's way of pointing the narrative often suggests a Horatio Alger story for intellectuals. For example, one day when the grocer comes to check on Gilman's "climbing bill," Gilman's recollections of the event emphasize equally her desperation and her ability to impress (or is it charm?) the "nice elderly gentleman": "I asked him into the parlor, and we sat there while I told him just how I was situated. 'You are a brave woman,' said he. 'You shall have credit at my store as long as you need it.' There was nothing brave about it. I went on because there was nothing else to do. Indeed I used to say that I was willing to 'eat crow'--but there was no crow to eat" (*Living* 151-52). This passage hints at something else--that Gilman's assumption of a social station beyond her economic status was instrumental in her living a lifestyle above her immediate financial means. The passage hardly describes a working-class home, with Gilman's parlor to greet gentleman callers. But bourgeois pretensions did no more than mollify, never eliminated, the difficulty of living without sufficient means. Some creditors were unwilling to give credit on the basis of social capital alone. There are, for instance, the two days in July 1894 when she wrote in her diary first, "Hunt desperately for money and can't get it. Feel miserably and can't work," and then, "Am feeling badly. Go down town to try to borrow that money. People mostly out. . . . Mr. Sargent is coldly rude to me when I ask him (for advance only). Not insolent but utterly cold and haughty. 'I know of no one whom I could approach with such a proposition' was all he said" (*Diaries*, vol. 2: 587).

**Chapter 4, page 151: “Barbara Foley’s *Spectres of 1919: Class and Nation in the Making of the New Negro* asserts that antisocialist and racist reaction in the immediate postwar years, coupled with renewed socialist and African American militancy, constitute a unique opportunity for revolutionary activity in the United States.”**

Barbara Foley’s *Spectres of 1919: Class and Nation in the Making of the New Negro* recognizes postwar violence and repression against labor, radicalism, and black Americans as interlinked, that the defense and indeed the global extension of American capitalism demanded these elements be brought to heel. She documents extensively the violence and agitation that I have summarized briefly, and she shows, moreover, the prevalence of socialist or at least socialistic explanations of the events of 1919 offered by individuals from across the left political spectrum, ranging from the merely liberal to the most radical, both white and black: Alain Locke as well as W. E. B. Du Bois, for example. In the fashion of other critics focused on American Communism, Foley also sees “The Revolutionary Upsurge of 1919” as a relatively evanescent phenomenon—emerging quite suddenly from the inspiration of the Bolshevik revolution and declaration of the Third International and diffusing—within just a few years--into a nonthreatening culturalist nationalism within the African-American community. Such a formation could be tolerated readily enough by the white capitalist hegemony, which meanwhile consolidated itself throughout the wider culture (Foley 8). By 1925, Alain Locke could reasonably proclaim a cultural, less overtly political understanding of the “New Negro” as defining the dominant current of thought and (in)action, but for a brief period in the wake of “the Red Summer of 1919,” Foley argues that a consensus of commentators saw in “The postwar New Negro was [. . .] an anticapitalist radical who envisioned African American emancipation as inseparable from—if not identical with—the project of a class-conscious, multiracial alliance” (69). Such an anticapitalist radical would be reawakened with the rise of

the Communist party in the 1930s, although both then and in 1919 the prospect of revolutionary change was fatally undermined by errors of both theory and praxis (which are treated as essentially the same problem, as from Foley's point of view problems of insufficiently radical praxis may typically be traced back to errors of insufficiently rigorous Marxist theory).

One ghost that haunts Foley's vaunted revolutionary spectre at its moments of materialization—at those junctures, such as 1919, when the revolution appears closest to reality—is violence. Consistently, Foley equivocates about the role that it might play in revolutionary change, as when she notes that the truest radicals, “those who espoused revolution,” reached the conclusion that “capitalism, therefore, had to be supplanted, by either the ballot or the bullet, if racism was to be ended.” Unmistakably, though, the absolute demand for socialist revolution—“an egalitarian society run by the producers”—and the contingent allowance made for “the bullet” makes the former an end that justifies the latter as a means. The point is made indirectly when Foley underscores the affinity between socialists and John Brown, who was “frequently invoked as an insurgent ancestor—by African Americans and whites alike” (Foley 69).

Of course, we have already observed that consideration of John Brown as a precedent for home-grown American revolution was not a phenomenon only of the Bolshevik-inspired red summer of 1919. There are, moreover, other historical reasons for questioning the sharp rupture that Foley and others see in the Bolshevik revolution, particularly as she connects its impact directly to a surge in African-American resistance to oppression. The case for violent reaction against oppression did not wait upon the Bolshevik revolution of October 1917 or the Comintern of early 1919, but arose from many causes whose volatility was accelerated, although even then not entirely generated, by conditions that dated from the outbreak of the European war.

Although *Darkwater*, published in 1920, was comprised largely of material reworked from *Crisis* pieces originally published prior to 1919, the fact that so much of the analysis contained therein remains pertinent to contemporary events testifies strongly to the relevance of pre-Bolshevik socialist analysis. Most pertinent to our concerns (mine as well as Foley's) is the way that an early chapter in *Darkwater*, "The Hands of Ethiopia," formulates the relationship between European and American workers, led by a white-dominated labor movement, and exploited black workers in Africa. Du Bois's formulation lacks the crisp Marxist terminology of the bourgeois/proletariat divide, but he definitely articulates the key insight that Foley credits to the Bolshevik moment when he writes:

[I]t ought by this time to be realized by the labor movement throughout the world that no industrial democracy can be built on industrial despotism, whether the two systems are in the same country or in different countries, since the world today so nearly approaches a common industrial unity. If, therefore, it is impossible in any single land to uplift permanently skilled labor without also raising common labor, so, too, there can be no permanent uplift of American or European labor as long as African laborers are slaves. (70)

Here we find, precisely, the coupling of racist superexploitation with class exploitation, together with an understanding of common self interest between white workers and black, leading to the conclusion, to repeat Foley's words, "that only in an egalitarian society run by the producers would the material basis for racial antagonism be removed." Perhaps the passage evokes the meliorism that Foley attributes to the "prewar Darwinian phase" of Du Bois's anticapitalism (Foley 32), and indeed, at the heart of this passage are insights gleaned from Bellamy: that the coexistence of political democracy and economic autocracy is a contradiction ("no industrial



democracy can be built on industrial despotism”), and that in time this contradiction must resolve itself—if there is indeed to be progress—in a change to economic democracy. But contrary to Bellamy, Du Bois’s understanding is that the progress is *not* inevitable; Du Bois suggests that the more likely trend is toward the stratification of labor into levels of relative privilege and exploitation, sorted largely along racial lines in accord with longstanding racism. “Is it a paradise of industry we thus contemplate? It is much more likely to be a hell,” Du Bois explains; “All the industrial deviltry, which civilization has been driving to the slums and the backwaters, will have a voiceless continent to conceal it. If the slave cannot be taken from Africa, slavery can be taken to Africa” (63-64).

According to Foley, the faults and the decline of the black-and-red socialism of 1919 can be attributed largely to reliance upon nationalist discourses and attendant notions of racial essentialism, whether discourses of black nationalism, liberal pluralism, or reactionary nativism. Foley recognizes Du Bois as one of a handful of writers who offered a limited counterweight to these discourses, as she spots an antiessentialist passage in *John Brown*, one in which Du Bois calls for “the abolition of hard and fast lines between races, just as it called for the breaking down of barriers between classes” (qtd. Foley 32). But Foley underestimates Du Bois’s contribution to antiessentialist thought, overlooking, for instance, a much more substantive discussion in the *Darkwater* chapter “Of Work and Wealth.” While integrating the earlier argument against race essentialism, Du Bois shows the interconnection between racism and class exploitation:

[H]ere is no simple question of race antagonism. There are no races, in the sense of great, separate, pure breeds of men, differing in attainment, development, and capacity. There are great groups,—now with common history, now with common

interests, now with common ancestry; more and more common experience and present interest drive back the common blood and the world today consists, not of races, but of the imperial commercial group of master capitalists, international and predominantly white; the national middle classes of the several nations, white, yellow, and brown, with strong blood bonds, common languages, and common history; the international laboring class of all colors; the backward, oppressed groups of nature-folk, predominantly yellow, brown, and black. (98)

Allowing that Du Bois's characterization of the final group of "nature-folk" implies clearly a scale of cultural value based upon the standard of modern industrialization, we should recognize here the degree to which Du Bois's formulation challenges both national boundaries and racial types. From Foley's point of view, this kind of challenge comes from the wrong source, for Du Bois merely shows "socialist leanings," as one of the "socialist sympathizers of the time" (32). The chronology is wrong, as well, for Du Bois's reflections are too clearly linked to a line of analysis going back for nearly a decade, well into the high period of the Second Internationale. Not only does Du Bois's analysis of international capitalism hark back to *The Negro*, published early in the war. "Of Work and Wealth" also employs essentially the same rubric announced in the 1913 *New Review* article. Then he had called it "the test of the excluded class." Now, he was trying to come to terms with the conditions that led to the East St. Louis riot, particularly by assessing the social relations between the conflicting groups: the capitalist employers, only too happy to have two distinct groups of laborers competing with each other for employment; white workers, overtly racist but themselves just beginning to get "out beyond the horrid shadow of poverty"; migrant black workers attempting to "compel men with loaves to divide with men who starve." Examining the social standing and moral claims of

the group thus, Du Bois framed his core principle: “[O]ne answer looms above all,—justice lies with the lowest; the plight of the lowest man,—the plight of the black man—deserves the first answer, and the plight of the giants of industry, the last” (*Darkwater* 91).

**Chapter 5, page 163: “As far as socialist writers and readers were concerned, the literary discourses of utopianism and realism were always complementary . . . .”**

Howells provides a leading example not only of the articulation of socialist aims through Realist literary forms but also their articulation through Utopian forms. Having joined Edward Bellamy’s Nationalist movement early on, Howells’s *A Traveler from Altruria* (1894) and *Through the Eye of the Needle* (1907) presented in detail the kind of socialist, cooperative and egalitarian society that formed the clear antidote to the politically cynical, economically and socially unequal society that Howells described in his Realist fiction. Also in the utopian vein, in the late 1880s and 1890s Howells expressed his admiration for the radical egalitarian turn taken by Russia’s great Realist writer, Leo Tolstoy. Howells could not bring himself to give up his own worldly wealth and live among the American working class, but that did not prevent him from celebrating Tolstoy’s decision to divide his estate among his peasants and go to the fields to work among them (Shi 195; Kirk 16-17, 22-23).

The relation between Realist critique and Utopian-socialist remedy neither began nor ended with Howells, however. The commerce between socialist activism and Utopian writing was wide ranging throughout the 1890s and beyond. A listing of just a few utopian novel titles indicates the variety and specificity of the connections: *The Birth of Freedom; A Socialist Novel* (1890); *The People’s Program; The Twentieth Century is Theirs. A Romance of the Expectations of the Present Generation* (1892); ‘96; *A Romance of Utopia, Presenting a Solution to the Labor Problem, a New God and a New Religion* (1894); *In Brighter Climes, Or Life in Socioland. A Realistic Novel* (1895); *An Ideal Republic or Way Out of the Fog* (1895); *President John Smith; The Story of a Peaceful Revolution* (1897); *Hilda’s Home: A Story of Woman’s Emancipation* (1899); *The World a Department Store. A Story of Life Under the*

*Cooperative System* (1900). (For these titles and more, see the bibliography in Matarese).

Dystopian writing, always a possible variant within the Utopian mode, was often used to prognosticate the failure of utopian schemes. But in 1891, sensationalist fiction writer and Populist party organizer Ignatius Donnelly wrote *Caesar's Column*, a specimen of the subgenre in which the twentieth-century is portrayed as a nightmare world of oligarchic domination and murderous intrigue—apparently to mobilize voters for immediate, radical social change before it was too late. In 1907 Jack London's *The Iron Heel* was written in much the same vein, except his scenario foresees hundreds of years of revolution and violence before the dawning of a new, cooperative socialist society. These texts hint not only at the various ways that Realism and Utopianism might be integrated into a socialist or socialistic program, but also at the ways that debates within the socialist movement came to be reflected within this variety: the optimistic assessment of the non-Marxian socialist Bellamy foreseeing some one-hundred years of cooperative social harmony by the year 2000, the gloomy forecast of the Marxist and Nietzschean London countering that three centuries of repression, struggle, and bloodshed lay ahead before the dawning of the cooperative commonwealth.

**Chapter 5, page 163: “Presumably, in the best of all possible political and literary worlds, the two modes would be brought together, so that each one’s strength might serve as the remedy for the other’s liability.”**

That in the work of Howells and other socialists Realist and Utopian texts are functioning together toward common ends, if not exactly in sync, seems without question to be the case. But how does this work, when at first glance it would appear that the Utopian and Realist modes are antithetical? As a matter of basic definition, Utopian fiction is set in a time and/or place other than the present, whereas Realist fiction is located in a time and place as close as possible to those of the author and his or her contemporary audience. The Utopian tells how things ought to be; its nearest contact to present social reality may be its suggestion that an alternative world *might* be possible—that the present can, in the future, develop to meet the Utopian fiction’s imagined possibility (but never quite with the full assurance that it will). The Realist tells how things *are*; its nearest approach to an alternative social reality is its suggestion that this reality *ought* to be different—perhaps, at its most critical and dialectical, that the world *must* be different (but never quite with the full assurance that it can be). In practice, too, the contrast between Realism and Utopianism in fictional technique is sharp. Grounded in an everyday reality rife with the conflicts of contemporary society, Realist fiction has at its disposal rich opportunities for representing character and setting, the potential for complex plots, sharp conflict, and high narrative tension. Because Utopian fiction presents a world unlike our own, details of character and setting tend to be sketchier; because it typically represents a social reality in which social tensions have been redressed, the genre virtually rules out narrative conflict and suspense. In its place we have long discursive passages, often organized around the queries of an ignorant visitor from our own world and the knowledgeable replies of a host from the Utopian world.

Still, socialist intellectuals considered the theoretical as well as the practical possibilities to foment socialist change through both the Utopian and Realist modes. For example, the dialogic relation possible between them is extemporized upon in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's 1904 nonfiction study, *Human Work*, her most comprehensive examination of contemporary social relations and labor. Even in the most directly expressive relationship of art to its environing culture, Gilman postulates a pivotal difference: "Holland made the Dutch painters, not they Holland. They in return in their accomplished work made Holland Hollander [. . .]" (267). Even when the art merely reinforces the *status quo*, it has the effect of consolidating and amplifying it. Gilman is not interested only in this essentially affirming version of the Realist artist's social contract, however. The representational dimension of art, Gilman asserts, might function—ought to function—quite differently when the society reflected is ethically abhorrent. A French painter in the period before the French Revolution, Gilman imagines, might find that "if I can't paint better things" than "these torture-chamber scenes," then "I'll take to pottery or weaving" (269). Yet again, this artist might choose a socially critical alternative, the path in fact traveled by many Realists including Howells in his later work. Gilman imagines the artist saying: "'Well, that is the way you feel, is it? Better let it out then. Perhaps you'll change quicker if you *see* your badness [. . .]" (268). Here, the slight distance afforded by the Realist reflection might prompt moral reflection and social change.

Yet even as Gilman offers a kind of case for the social power of Realist art, her analysis also shows how much depends upon the perspective, the angle of vision, the framing, and the focus of the particular artist and the reader. For every artist who may see in the slums of Paris the grave of the *anciens regime*, there may be many others who celebrate Versailles as a testament to the glory of absolute monarchy. In short, the Realist technique is not always

enough for readers to attain sufficient distance on their own society to see their “badness.” As she explains later in *Human Work*, “Our minds are so thoroughly accustomed to thinking along false lines in economics that true and natural social processes, when described to them, seem but fantastic dreams” (321).

What readers need, in addition, is art--and especially literature--that relies not upon a slight gap between represented reality and its social experience, but rather a much more obvious separation that encourages readers more actively to imagine alternative realities. Although she does not name this kind of art Utopian, any more than she labels the minutely representational art of the Dutch masters Realist, it is unmistakably the utopian dimension that she highlights--and celebrates. Gilman finds in the expansion of the market for fiction writing--even (or especially) for fantastic and fanciful creations--certain material conditions that may open possibilities for social change:

In the wonderful spread of the great art, Literature, and particularly the branch art, Fiction, as distributed so universally among us by our libraries, our periodicals, and the daily press, we have far more general use of the imagination--our brains will stretch. This faculty of imagination is no mere factor in telling fairy-tales; it is that power of seeing over and under and around and through, of foreseeing, of constructing hypotheses, by which science and invention profit as much as art. (Gilman, *Human* 321)

As in her account of the socially critical as opposed to the socially affirming versions of Realism, however, Gilman vacillates on whether the imaginative work demanded will come as a matter of course, through the “universal” distribution of imaginative fiction, or whether fiction of a Utopian tendency must be critical, prophetic, and unpopular. Earlier in *Human Work*, she



had seen the work of imaginative projection as working against, not with, the trend of common sense especially as defined by the marketplace: “The worker, artist or scientist, inventor or teacher, must often differ with the purchasing public; must modify his work by his own reason and conscience, not by that of the other people [ . . . ] . It may cost him his life at the time; he may have to set himself and his views against those of the past and present [ . . . ]” (271-72). In either event, though, Gilman’s emphasis upon the imaginative work of “seeing over and under and around and through” and of “foreseeing” and “constructing hypotheses” makes clear that she saw the Utopian mode as the necessary complement to Realism. Sinclair was much more inclined toward Realism, whereas Du Bois practiced the Utopian and Realist modes in roughly equal measure in his fiction. Yet for both, Gilman’s schematic demonstration of the social usefulness of Utopianism as well as Realism clearly describes critical elements of their fictional practice. To witness an example, we need only to recall the multiple utopian visions of *The Jungle*’s ending that culminated the three-hundred-plus pages of mostly grim Realism going before.

The tension in Gilman’s account—it might well register as a flat contradiction--between an expectation of easy, gradual, and practically automatic social progress, on the one hand, and a necessity of utterly radical, sharp, and hard-fought political agitation, on the other, helps us to register the wide flexibility of the two literary modes or tropes. The fact that Realism and Utopianism may work toward similar socially constructive ends—not merely the reflection of society, but its transformation—does not in any way guarantee the direction of transformation desired or fostered through the literary work. The Realist author may well have conservative intentions as well as produce conservative effects: that has been a widely held assumption about Howells’s Realist work of the mid 1880s, and it is certainly the impression given by

Gilman's opening example of the Dutch Renaissance painters making "Holland Hollander."

Utopian fictions, Susan Matarese maintains, generally work as "vehicles of social criticism and reform, meant to engage our sympathies and our desires in the direction of the policies favored by the writer," but she also points out that the policies favored by the writer may well move in antiprogressive directions, as for example criticism of national isolationism might lead to demands for a newly expansionist foreign policy (Matarese 8).

This qualification hardly means that conservative and progressive social ends are indistinguishable from one another in Utopian and Realist fictions, just that interpretive care and circumspection must be practiced in reading them. Similarly, the sliding political and generic significations of the Utopian and the Realist modes do not mean that the cultural and political work they perform is identical. Better to say that they may be (not must be) complementary—and certainly that they are not, as it first appears, antithetical. To repeat: the Realist mode does not predicate social stasis; the Utopian mode is not unmoored (or unhinged) from social reality. But the Utopian mode does, nevertheless, in its typical structure accentuate the changeability of social structure and the possibility of social progress. The cultural work attempted by Utopian narratives is various; it includes conservative as well as progressive utopias, heavenly utopias and anti-utopias that emphasize the difficulty of human perfectibility as well as earthly utopias and "pragmatopias" that accentuate the possibility of a much better society in the very near future (Kessler 7). Because, however, Utopian literature is fundamentally structured around a gap between social reality and an alternative to that reality, the utopian form is essentially transformative: it always *imagines* change, even if that change is perceived as negative (as in anti-utopian or dystopian literature) or if the change proposed is politically reactionary (Pfaelzer 13).

The Realist mode, meanwhile, by its close attention to quotidian life not only “reveals the self-contradictions” within a social structure, as Thomas Peyser suggests (8); it also gestures dramatically to a common basis of human life in the biological, material, and social realms, and hence to a shared understanding of what might constitute human well-being and a common discourse that ought to be available for mediating competing human claims. As Pam Morris argues about the progressive impulse working through Realism’s history as a literary movement, “Sharable knowledge about the conditions of embodied human creatures in the geographical world constitutes the material basis from which universal claims of justice and well-being must spring,” and therefore even the barest outline of the Realist project, a merely accurate representation of the social world, becomes progressive insofar as it may help to describe the real conditions of inequality under which the members of a society live (132).

As the transformative possibilities typically envisioned by the Utopian mode are always conditioned by current reality, and as the “real conditions” typically described in the Realist mode are always historically and socially created, we can only go so far with our accounts of anti-authoritarian and egalitarian “possibilities,” described in general terms. We must locate these possibilities within our own—in this case, American as well as global—social and historical contexts. Because, however, the examples of Gilman, Sinclair, and Du Bois do share a certain historical continuity and political congruence, common ground that we have already detailed in Part One, we may reasonably venture an hypothesis about the interrelations between Utopianism and Realism in the writing of Gilman, Sinclair, Du Bois and other socialists. Quite simply: for them, *Realism* was the primary literary mode for articulating their critique of the reigning hegemony, chiefly defined by capitalism and characterized by economic and social inequality. *Utopianism* was, in turn, the primary literary mode for describing the preferred

social and economic alternative characterized by equality and variously called socialism, social democracy, industrial democracy, the cooperative commonwealth, etc.

During the Second Internationale, the power of socialists' critique and their utopian projections depended upon a fairly emphatic separation between the two. The common theme that Gilman, Sinclair, Du Bois, and their fellow socialists repeatedly returned to was the contrast between the real inequality of American society as organized by capitalist political economy and the ideal equality to be achieved by social democratic evolution, or revolution, as the case might be. But as we have already observed in our previous discussions of utopian and scientific socialism, the terms were always interconnected, shifting, and multiple. Here is where the literary and cultural analysis must likewise be supple, circumspect, and various. So, for example, we might note that one of the key strategic moves in the critique of capitalist hegemony was to demonstrate how key correlative terms—for example, rugged individualism—are *merely* utopian projections. Conversely, one of the key arguments in favor of a particular feature represented in a socialist utopia was to suggest its practicality, rationality—in short, the possibility of its realization. At their best, too, Gilman, Sinclair, and Du Bois practiced a hermeneutics of suspicion about what, precisely, counted as the real (what *was* the relation of the middle classes to capitalist hegemony?) and what counted as the ideal (*did* Soviet Russia in fact represent a model for others to follow?). The hermeneutic had profound effects in the shaping of their social democratic politics, particularly as it played out over time; for instance, as Progressive-Era reforms were enacted, social democrats debated what must be challenged in the continuing capitalistic order, and what might be embraced as a genuine milestone on the path to socialism.

Ultimately, the relational and historically evolving relationships between capitalist

reality and socialist utopia brought into play a variety of issues that might not have seemed important had the contest been simply a matter of fixed historical, political, and ethical binaries, wherein capitalism and socialism could be posited as irreducible opposites. What role might nationalism in its various manifestations play not only in undermining international socialism but in catalyzing its emergence? How might antiracism among socialists—or racism among them—impact the formation of social democracy? What was the constructive or destructive influence of the Great War upon international socialism? And how, in a period characterized by intense masculine conflict and self-destruction, would the claim to women’s equality be acted upon within the social democratic movement? These concerns did not necessarily obscure the core utopian objective—social and economic equality, or in Marxist parlance, a “classless society”—but they did generate conundrums about just what that equality would mean as socialists sought its realization: Did the critical role of the economic base in inequality, a fundamental premise of Marxist and non-Marxist socialists alike, permit agitation on the cause of labor rights as a priority over agitation on women’s suffrage or antilynching legislation? Such questions, probing the interconnections, shifts, and multiple significations of Realism and Utopianism, are where the more demanding interpretive work must be done.

**Chapter 6, page 204: “Because in the novel’s opening chapters Ellador and Van arrive in Europe via England, Ellador is practically guaranteed seeing the circumstances and cause of the war from an Anglo- and Francophilic perspective.”**

In the second chapter of *With Her in Ourland*, on one of the ships that brings Ellador, Van, and Terry from the South American coast to the centers of androcentric civilization, Ellador takes the measure of one of her shipmates: a single “German officer” from whom she generalizes about the national character of one of the war’s principal combatants. Observing the encounter, Van reports “how soon the clear light of her mind brought out the salient characteristics of his, and of how, in spite of all her exalted philosophy, she turned shuddering away from him” (Gilman, *Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s Utopian Novels* 281) Through this early reaction and Ellador’s subsequent remarks, Gilman uses her main character rather unapologetically to represent German militarism as the principal force behind the current war. Because Terry wishes to volunteer as a pilot for the Allies, the party swiftly seizes an opportunity to transfer from a Swedish liner (on which Ellador’s distasteful encounter with the German officer occurs) to a British ship bound for England. So when Ellador goes to research the circumstances and causes of the Great War, she does so in an English library that focuses upon the alleged German atrocities in Belgium. Such a circumstance might be viewed variously. Unmistakably, it reveals Gilman’s own bias with respect to the Great War combatants. The extent to which she reveals a key condition of American sympathy with the Allies—British and French influence upon U.S. media—may be more a matter of latter-day analysis. Yet this analysis too is made possible, plainly, by Gilman’s novel.

**Chapter 6, page 207: “Such snap judgments based upon a tourist’s acquaintance with these non-Western nations would appear to give fodder to the longstanding criticism of Gilman as ethnocentrist and racist.”**

Critics of *With Her in Ourland* might note that Ellador’s tour of world cultures does not touch sub-Saharan Africa at all, as if there is not “culture” there worth mentioning. The criticism is a frequent one of the much more frequently read and analyzed half of the duology, *Herland*, where references to the Herlanders as “Aryan” by racial lineage draw attention, and the affinities between the European-American men and the Herlander women of evidently European descent prompt Thomas Peyser to quip that the tale of Gilman’s male adventurers becomes, primarily, “the story of whites becoming reacquainted with their own essential whiteness” (Peyser 82).

The difficulties in racial representation actually multiply when, at last, Ellador arrives in the United States. Adopting the role of a physician seeking to describe symptoms, offer diagnosis, and prescribe cures for what ails the U.S. body politic, Ellador’s four remedies are a decidedly mixed lot. Ellador’s third and fourth prescriptions seem reasonable enough, as they are essentially Gilman’s tried-and-true formulas: gender equality both in political and economic affairs; public ownership of all large-scale industry and natural resources. The first prescribed remedy--antiracism--proves more problematic. For even as she skewers racist attitudes about miscegenation and black laziness, Ellador opines that “the human race is in different stages of development, and only some races—or some individuals in a given race—have reached the democratic stage.” Not surprisingly, in view of Gilman’s comments elsewhere, African-Americans are supposed to belong to one of the races with few individuals ready for self-government. Equally troubling is Ellador’s subsequent discussion of Jews, whom she faults for having been the first people “to make their patriomania into a religion” (Gilman,

*Charlotte Perkins Gilman's Utopian Novels* 361). To combat anti-Semitism, Ellador suggests that Jews should ““leave off being Jews”” (363)—as if this were an original solution, not the policy of most European countries for centuries, and the rationalization for their pogroms against those Jews who insisted on remaining Jews!

Ellador's second remedy for U.S. social problems—that the United States must place stricter limits upon those it admits through immigration—reinforces all the more the attitudes apparent in her discussions of black and Jewish Americans. A more restrictive immigration policy, Ellador suggests (echoing the policies described in *Moving the Mountain*), is needed to ensure all recent arrivals are up to the democratic standard. ““Democracy is a psychic relation,”” Ellador explains, and because ““It requires the intelligent conscious co-operation of a great many persons all “equal” in the characteristics required to play that kind of a game,”” an indiscriminate open-door policy to all immigrants means the admission of many who are unready to engage as equal partners in the American political “game” (312, 323).

For a novel that touts the reliability of the Herlander standpoint and postulates the necessity of self-conscious, rational judgments in the solution of social problems, such prescriptions may provoke a crisis for readers, if not evidently in Gilman's didactic exposition. Is rationality so irrational, so ethically unreliable, after all? The juxtaposition of radical socialism and feminism with apparently intentional race prejudice in *Herland/Ourland* certainly reinforces observations we have already made with reference to Gilman's *Moving the Mountain* and several of Sinclair's works: the alarming degree to which racist and racist sentiments and resentments percolated through the socialist movement, especially during the Second Internationale when a broad-based, populist party was more likely to reflect wide-spread cultural prejudices than, say, the more centralized, doctrinaire Communist Party.



The issue is not whether racist attitudes and practices can coexist with egalitarian ideals within a movement or individual; the historical examples provided by our socialists (among many others that might be cited) demonstrate that they can. The issue is, rather, whether we can show logically the irrationality of such a coexistence. With reference to the work of Gilman and other socialists, the question is whether and how we can disentangle the promising and the positive from the dangerous and the negative in their work. It is my contention not only that this can be done but also that Gilman's work provides a variety of avenues for furthering the process of untangling--and not just in the flagrant openness of her racial attitudes that practically undoes itself, in classic deconstructive style.

For example, already in *Herland* Gilman's conceptual framework seeks to challenge, not affirm, customary assumptions about hierarchies of culture. The *Herland* narrative implicitly challenges notions of white supremacy and racial kinship between the Herlanders and the male adventurers. In the meeting of the Herland council in which the idea of contact between Herland and the outside world is debated, Van and his male comrades are discomfited at the information the Herlanders have gleaned from conversations with them and from a "traitorous" little book, a world almanac, that the men have brought with them. Van comments that "the broad racial divisions we had told them about" had never elicited a "shocked expression" or an "exclamation of revolt" among the Herlanders, but clearly the report now offered by the Herlanders about the condition of the outside world reveals a certain degree of revulsion among them. Were Peyser's argument accurate, precisely this information about racial divisions, the differing status of various civilizations, and so forth, should be cause for racial solidarity between the Herlanders and their white, western visitors. But this is exactly the information that proves embarrassing to Van. The Herlanders suspect that the similarities

between the various androcentric cultures are stronger than the differences: “We find also that in spite of the advance of democracy and the increase of wealth, that there is still unrest and sometimes combat” (268). This worry is essentially ratified near the outset of *Ourland*, when the unprecedented scale of destruction and killing on the western front is confronted by Ellador and Van is obliged to confess that “It is worse than the humble savagery below [y]our mountains” (269).

**Chapter 6, page 221: “But because the story of Jimmie is not solely an individual one but a collective one, and because this is not yet a story with an end as long as there are comrades—and readers—to remember and act upon his story . . . .”**

One of the passages describing the grim determination of Jimmie’s comrades in the United States, once his fate is known, throws the possibility of violent, revolutionary tumult into a venerable, ratifying American frame of reference. Sinclair offers a theodicy for civil war for the liberation of labor, analogizing from the justification that Abraham Lincoln had given for Union cause in the 1861-65 U.S. Civil War: “If God will that [the war] continue until all the wealth piled by the bondman’s two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as it was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said, ‘The judgements of the Lord are true and righteous altogether’” (*Jimmie Higgins* 258).

**Chapter 7, page 231: “there is a curious homology between postwar discourses in radical politics and in the arts.”**

The brutal either-or choices presented by the war, as well as by the sharp revolutionary and counter-revolutionary ebb-and-flow of the postwar aftermath, may well find expression in the sharp contrasts described by Michael Gold: between idealists concerned with shadows and pragmatists grappling with the real; between genuine poets speaking the truth of experience and literary poseurs spouting patriotic bromides; or as Jameson puts it, between “new and more radical artistic practices” and “the stifling closure of high bourgeois culture” (134). But such a sharp, politicized dichotomy is far from being unprecedented. The Modernist break with mainstream culture recalls the political and ideological antinomies that had marked the struggle between socialism and capitalism and between the competing socialist movements, as well.

The bitter debate over Utopian versus Scientific socialism in the nineteenth century provides a definite precedent for the quasi-scientific claims of Gold or of the Modernist litterateurs (consider T. S. Eliot’s “objective correlative” or Ezra Pound’s use of the newest terms in cognitive psychology as backing for imagism). As in the nineteenth-century debate, the claim of scientific rigor and objectivity almost immediately becomes the best warrant for one’s own idealistic and Utopian projections. This is what we find subtly in William Carlos Williams’s claim to employ material things as the best possible basis for *ideas*, and nakedly in Gold’s suggestion that Russia’s “business of bringing in Communism” represents no less than “the earth in the throes of the birth of a new race of giants.” Not only in presenting the visitor’s reaction to Russia in terms of a fundamental choice, but also in proceeding later to say that a trip to the Soviet Union “is a spiritual experience in many ways; and I feel a little differenet [sic] and stronger for having made it,” Gold draws upon a familiar rhetoric of religious

conversion, which had served Sinclair and other earlier socialist writers as the plausible pivot into pure Utopian projection (letter to Sinclair).

The centrifugal pull of the new socialist realities—the Bolshevik revolution and the Soviet state--was unmistakably felt by Sinclair, Du Bois, and Gilman as well as Michael Gold. Gilman, in fiercely resisting that pull, not only came to feel isolated from the current radical movement but also exaggerated the difference between her own brand of socialism and that promulgated by the postwar revolutionaries. Sinclair and Du Bois responded more affirmatively but also remained cautious. In the 1920s, during the most hopeful years of revolutionary transformation in the Soviet Union and a discouraging time of reactionary retrenchment in the United States, such skeptical or guarded responses seemed not only unsatisfactory but irrational.

But the elder generation of socialists had not seen and experienced less than their younger Communist comrades; they had seen and experienced more. They had felt the pull of cataclysmic events and great historical forces; they had recognized the possibility that these might offer a sudden rupture leading out of capitalism and into the socialist millennium, subverting by a colossal revolutionary stroke the necessity of many individual conversions and the compromises of everyday politics. In part because during the war they had entertained, as well, Willa Cather's parallel hope expressed in *One of Ours*—that the world might be made right by the agency of the American nation, that greed might be conquered by the immersion of the individual in the national collective—they had become both more leery of pinning too much hope upon the influence of a single nation upon world affairs and nevertheless, paradoxically, less willing to give up entirely on the possibilities of working through the mechanisms of U.S. liberal democracy. Certainly, the preference of Gilman, Sinclair, and Du Bois for a nonviolent

and legal path into socialism was strongly conditioned by their prewar experiences as part of the Second Internationale, but that preference was also reaffirmed after the war, by their critical observation of the Third Internationale and their recognition of social democratic potential even within America's postwar "normalcy."

**Chapter 7, page 241: “Du Bois was critical not only of any government led by rich aristocrats but of the literary aristocracy of the Renaissance.”**

Through the first half of 1926, leading up to his peroration at the NAACP convention (“I do not care a damn for any art that is not used for propaganda”), Du Bois conducted a symposium in the pages of *The Crisis* asking “how the Negro should be treated in art” that was unmistakably framed as an accusation of the artistic license and apoliticism of many of the Renaissance artists (one item in the questionnaire: “What are Negroes to do when they are continually painted at their worst and judged by the public as they are painted?”) (“Negro in Art”).

In “Criteria for Negro Art,” the convention speech appearing later in 1926 in *The Crisis*, Du Bois appears to allow a place for a great many of the usual criteria for art: “this great work of creation of Beauty”; the “Truth [which] eternally thrusts itself as the highest handmaid of imagination, as the one great vehicle of universal understanding”; “Goodness [. . .] in all its aspects of justice, honor and right”; and the necessary “freedom” of artistic expression (296, 292). Yet artistic freedom, like the rest of these criteria, leads in Du Bois’s conception ineluctably to the artist’s social responsibility. To be sure, artistic creation and artistic enjoyment should be “free,” particularly given that there is no hard and fast limit upon its supply, for the “variety” of Beauty “is infinite, its possibility is endless. In normal life all may have it and have it yet again. The world is full of it [. . .]” (292). But taking the “free” and independent artists at their word, joining in their assumption that artistic creation is an individualistic and highly various enterprise, and then drawing the inference that therefore it *can* and *should* be enjoyed by all individuals, Du Bois both greatly extends the social responsibility of the artist and makes the artist more closely dependent upon a general movement toward social equality. Beauty may indeed be the aim of artistic creation, but

Beauty cannot enjoy its broadest and highest expression when it cannot be enjoyed by all.



**Chapter 8, page 279: “Abram Harris, an economics professor at Howard University, had been in correspondence with Du Bois for over a decade.”**

Du Bois found reason to believe that he, not the NAACP board and officers, was closer to the vanguard of black leadership when he recognized the radicalism of so many of the younger intellectuals. Chief among Du Bois’s contacts among the younger radicals was Abram Harris. Known to Du Bois since 1919, Harris had submitted an article entitled “Black Communists in Dixie” for *Crisis* consideration in 1924. In November of 1925, the young professor of economics wrote to report that he had recently quit his instructorship at a small black college, the West Virginia Collegiate Institute, and called upon Du Bois, who “might rightly be called the Father of the Negro intelligentsia,” to join with him and other young scholars to found “[a] new college,” presumably an all-black school, “similar to the New School of Social Research” (Harris, letter to Du Bois). By February 1927 Du Bois wrote to Harris discussing the possibility of hiring him as a regular member of the *Crisis* staff (Du Bois, letter to Harris). Instead, Harris forged ahead upon a doctorate in economics from Columbia University, in July of 1929 asking for and receiving permission to look over Du Bois’s accumulated files on the subject of cooperative economics (Harris, letter to Du Bois, 6 July; Du Bois, letter to Harris, 17 July). When portions of Harris’s doctoral dissertation were published in a book co-written with a white collaborator, Sterling Spero, Du Bois assisted by reading the page proofs (Du Bois, letter to Harris, 7 Nov. 1930). Although Harris and Spero’s book, *The Black Worker* (1931), was skeptical about one of Du Bois’s longstanding favorite schemes, the notion of semi-autonomous black communes that he had described as far back as *Quest of the Silver Fleece*, Du Bois otherwise had reason to be well pleased with the concurrence of Harris and Spero’s conclusions with his own. Most critically, without naming the Communists specifically, Harris and Spero

criticized the Communist focus on recruiting black Americans. Effectively ratifying the Du Boisian position, they countered that because white workers comprised the larger and more powerful proletarian faction, interracial cooperation and radicalization depended upon them, not the minority of black workers (Spero and Harris 469).

**Chapter 8, page 306: “Sinclair redrew the boundary between EPIC and the New Deal, between true social democracy and mere liberalism . . . .”**

Sinclair’s backlash against Roosevelt and the New Deal was, as it happened, a relatively short-term response. As in the later 1930s and ‘40s Sinclair returned largely and voluminously to his regular job as book writer, he swung back toward the more sympathetic position hammered out in the 1934 campaign. In U.S. politics, he increasingly looked to the New Deal and F. D. R. for the achievement of social and economic democracy. It is one of the stranger turns in the intertwined, fictive and real existences of Upton Sinclair that one of the central figures—and the unquestioned moral and political authority—to emerge in the eleven volumes of the *Lanny Budd* series should be none other than Franklin Delano Roosevelt, whom many of Sinclair’s supporters regarded as Sinclair’s betrayer in the 1934 campaign and who, though defended gamely by Sinclair, comes off in *I, Candidate* as driven by short-range political calculations and as shortsighted in his analysis. The hero-worship becomes so deep in *O, Shepherd, Speak!*, second to last in the series, that after F.D.R.’s death, narrated dutifully in Sinclair’s historical fiction, the Great Leader continues to guide events from beyond the grave by imparting his wit and wisdom via seances conducted by Lanny.

**Chapter 8, page 306: “Communist fellow-traveler Langston Hughes, just returned from his trip to the Soviet Union and residing in northern California, had been too busy to accept W. E. B. Du Bois’s invitation to travel east and add his prestige to the social democratic majority at the Amenia conference.”**

Conspicuously absent from the proceedings at Amenia was the brightest literary light to emerge from the Harlem Renaissance, another radical who could have happily voted with the majority: Langston Hughes. Hughes had been invited but declined to come. At the time of Amenia, he was in California having just returned from a nearly year-long sojourn in the Soviet Union, for which he and twenty other African-Americans had been recruited to act the principal roles in a propaganda film about an Alabama coal strike (Lewis 319-20; Rampersad 265). At least as important as the film had been the opportunity for the Soviets to show off their socialist, multicultural and polyglot republic to an influential group of young black Americans. Like Du Bois, Mike Gold, and a number of Communists and fellow travelers before him, Hughes was impressed with what he saw. Biographer Arnold Rampersad reports that he became part of the “radical core of the group” who found good reason to tolerate the bureaucratic excesses and even the authoritarian anti-individualism of the Soviet administration, for Soviet Russia offered signs of industrial development, definite policies of ethnic and racial equality, and democratic access to education (243, 249-50, 257).

We may reasonably interpret a measured coolness toward the NAACP in Hughes’s preference to remain in California, where he stayed through most of 1934, collaborating with Communist Ella Winter on an agitprop play about the hop-workers’ strike that had been brutally crushed that summer. Regardless of possibilities for reforming, even radicalizing, the functions of the NAACP, Hughes’s closer organizational affiliations at the time were with the Communists, and according to Rampersad, the party’s quick and bold action on behalf of the

Scottsboro Boys was the principal reason (Rampersad 216). James Smethurst summarizes the fine points of Hughes's left-wing dossier with attention to the durability of this affiliation: "With the exception of Richard Wright," Hughes was "the black writer most identified with the Communist Left during the 1930s"; he was active in "Communist-initiated campaigns" to defend the Scottsboro boys and to rally support for the Spanish loyalists; he let his name be circulated in connection with the John Reed Clubs, the League of Struggle for Negro Rights, the National Negro Congress, the League of Professional Groups for Foster and Ford, and the League of American Writers; and he was even a signatory to a 1938 open letter "supporting the purges of the Old Bolsheviks and others by Stalin" (93-94). William Maxwell identifies Hughes unequivocally as "the most public, productive—and prolifically red—African-American poet of the century" (133). Michael Thurston notes that he was "the single most frequent [African-American] contributor to the *New Masses*" (87).

Still, in Rampersad's account as well as in most others, there is an evident dose of ambivalence in Hughes's commitment to the Communists. Rampersad cites the appeal of the Communists' Scottsboro activism as evidence that Hughes was a fellow traveler more as a matter of practical exigency than because of hard-and-fast philosophical conviction. Other recent critics note Hughes's multiple personae as a poet. Smethurst finds that in the 1930s Hughes was writing simultaneously as a poet attuned to the aims and interests of the Communist party, a poet directed towards a non-elite black audience, and a poet maintaining ties with the black, metropolitan elites that had formed the backbone of the Harlem Renaissance (94-95). In much the same vein, Michael Thurston stresses the "variability of Hughes's cultural position," which he links to both Hughes's multiple political affiliations and his mixed racial lineage (pointedly underscored during his first visit to Africa when Hughes was thought to be

“white”) (88, 87). For Thurston, especially, Hughes’s qualities of “variability” and multiple identity are political strengths: his “internal divisions position Hughes almost uniquely to perform the cultural work of effecting solidarity” (87). In effect, Thurston sees Hughes as occupying the role that we have witnessed Sinclair often assuming within the socialist movement, that of the coalition builder who stresses common ground in the multiple justice struggles within American society. But as we have seen in Sinclair’s case, the effort to forge coalitions and “effect” solidarity is not always successful. And the fact that there *are* divisions within various socially progressive movements testifies to social and political tensions that may not be constructive. In the case of Scottsboro, the struggle that led Hughes to affiliate with the Communists—chiefly, the fight between the NAACP and the Communist party over representation of the defendants—hardly looks to have been a political strength but was, quite to the contrary, a colossal problem. If it was necessary for Hughes to maintain as separate, internalized identities the “black Communist” and the “Communist artist” (Thurston’s phrases), what were the external conflicts that necessitated not only the construction of political solidarity between the camps but also the maintenance of separation between them? What *was* there for Hughes to be ambivalent about?

Consider Comrade Prokopec’s explanation of the Comintern line as laid down in the world congress of 1928. The essence of that line is a proclamation of political independence for black America, expressed both in goals, with the aim of an independent black state, and in strategy, with Prokopec’s expression of support for a black-led movement. Tolerance for bourgeois leadership within the black nationalist movement is repeatedly proclaimed; tolerance for whatever shape of government black Americans may choose is insisted upon: “The slogan of ‘Right to self-determination’ does not specify what form of government is to be established.

The Negro people have the right to decide this. It may be a Negro republic. If we limit it to a Soviet Republic, we automatically limit the movement and transform it into a proletarian movement (Communist Party)” (244). In effect, the Comintern position, as interpreted by Prokopec, permitted the same blurring of distinctions between the middle-class black leadership and the black masses that Du Bois made, and for precisely the same reasons offered by Du Bois: that blacks had a shared revolutionary agenda, insofar as all blacks, regardless of class, suffered from color discrimination.

But the Communist party line on the black nation within a nation had its own contradictory and troubling duplicity. Proclamations of black independence and leadership naturally appealed to Hughes, particularly when coupled with the pledge of white Communist support as in the Scottsboro struggle. There was another side to the Communist line, though: the old socialist “no-compromise” policy, not interpreted broadly to draw a bright line between capitalism and socialism in its various forms, but narrowly to proscribe all progressive social movements outside the Comintern. In effect, the Comintern line on black America was supposed to be so infallibly correct that the party could rightfully claim the roles of mentor, dialectician, and leader of black America. This authoritarian and repressive element marks Prokopec’s discourse repeatedly. In practice, it meant that the American party could reject virtually all assertions of black leadership which Prokopec’s statement promises—in theory—to respect. Following one lengthy quotation from the “Communist International Resolution on Negro Question in U.S.” featuring the activity of “our Party” and “the Party,” Prokopec notes that “It is [. . .] clear from the above who must educate the Negroes and give a lead to their struggles” (241). Following immediately after the statement guaranteeing black self-determination, quoted above, Prokopec puts the needs for black education in terms offensive

not only to black educators like Du Bois but also to the intelligence of blacks generally: “By properly approaching the Negro masses, by educating them that they are a national minority, have rights as such, [ . . . ] only with such approach can we fight the white chauvinism (white supremacy) effectively. It may mean slow, careful, and painstaking work, but, once we convince the Negro that he is equal to other peoples and as such has the right to self-determination, he will feel that he is ‘somebody’ and will fight for his rights” (244). Still further out of touch with the autonomy of black agency in the United States was the blithe ease with which Prokopec proposes to draw the current black leadership and organizational apparatus into the orbit of the Communist party: “The various existing Negro organizations (with the exception of the dying Garvey confused ‘back to Africa’ movement), the 450 Negro papers, all of which are struggling, some more militantly than others, against the imperialist oppressor, can easily be won over and directed into an organized national revolutionary movement of the oppressed Negroes” (245). Having made a right to black self-determination the cornerstone of his argument, Prokopec then denies the validity of any self-determination that sets a goal different from that of national sovereignty—the goal already determined as the “proper” one by the Communist party.

Such attitudes would have a role to play in the subsequent exit of Hughes and other black intellectuals from the Communist orbit. Although this exit lay well in the future, and Hughes was genuinely enthusiastic over the Communist party’s saving intervention on behalf of the Scottsboro defendants, the seeds of Hughes’s reservations about the party’s all-encompassing and ultimately stultifying suzerainty may be seen in Hughes’s literary output on Scottsboro—ironically, the very texts that Rampersad and others see as marking a sharp turn left that would persist throughout the Depression Decade.



Michael Thurston considers “Scottsboro, Limited” to be a triumph of coalition building between blacks and the Communist party, writing that “In the play’s transformative space and through the transformative media of rhythm, rhyme, and repetition, the problem of capitalist injustice unites workers of all colors under the Red flag, under the auspices of the ‘Internationale’ [sung at the conclusion of the play] and therefore the International” (110). In *New Negro, Old Left* William Maxwell concurs, although with a more negative conclusion about the basis of that coalition: a shared exploitation of women’s bodies (136). Without altogether refuting either of these readings, my own interpretation emphasizes other elements in the text: elements showing that “Scottsboro, Limited,” the longest and most polemical piece in Hughes’s chapbook response to Scottsboro, contains not only the terms of alliance between black America and the Communists but also the terms whereby Hughes envisages the sundering of that alliance. In effect, the text of this verse drama takes the Communist line on black independence at its word, establishing the Scottsboro defendants as agents of their own deliverance, and implying that should the Communist party ever move to curb that agency, such an imposition—and departure from the official party line—would serve as the grounds for separation from the party.

Maxwell notes that, as the play moves toward a climax, the black boys begin to “channel[] the voices of the lynch mob”; ““Burn us in the chair!”” they shout. Relief for the boys arrives, Maxwell asserts, only when the reds arrive on the scene, which would seem both to reflect the real-life intervention of the ILD and to give clear grounds for black fealty to the Communist party: “What saves them from this deadly internalization of hate is the intercession of ‘Red voices’ and the metamorphosis of the ‘8<sup>th</sup> Boy’ [. . .]” (136). But the passage Maxwell quotes, which is toward the end of the play, marks neither the first intercession of the Red

voices nor the first act of defiance among the boys.

The actual order of events as laid out in the play is critical. Near the middle of the play, the Judge and the “Girls” (Hughes’s generic moniker for Victoria Price and Ruby Bates, used in counterpoint to the culturally ubiquitous “Boys”) leave the stage after a well-coordinated courtroom performance resulting in the defendants’ convictions; they assure the “Mob Voices,” who have been calling for revenge from seats in the audience, that “They’ll burn, and soon at that.” Before any of the “Red Voices” in the audience cry out to encourage the Boys, a scene commences that reflects both individuation among the Boys and defiance in not one but at least three of them. While at first the Boys chant, as a collective voice echoing the mob voices, “Make it soon. Let us die. Make it soon,” the 6<sup>th</sup> Boy, “*Breaking away from the dumb circle*,” rebels: “No! No! No! What do they want to kill us for?” The 3<sup>rd</sup> Boy resolves: “I’ll break free!” And the 8<sup>th</sup> Boy explains to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Boy, who is doubtful about any chance of agency: “There ain’t no way for a nigger to break free, / They got us beaten and that’s how we gonna be / Unless we learn to understand— / We gotta fight our way out like a man.” The 4<sup>th</sup> Boy, though less assertive than the 8<sup>th</sup>, likewise sees a solution to their plight: “No, not out o’ here, / Unless the ones on the outside / Fight for us, too. / We’ll die—and then we’ll be through.” All of this happens before the first “Murmur of *Red Voices* in Audience: ‘We’ll fight for you boys. We’ll fight for you. / The Reds will fight for you’” (Hughes, “Scottsboro” 43-44). If the 4<sup>th</sup> Boy is definitely looking for Communist Party intervention, then he can and should at least be credited with originating the idea himself, and he certainly does not postulate the CP as the only “ones outside” whose help would be welcomed.

As if to underscore black—not Communist—leadership, Hughes’s *Scottsboro, Limited* dramatizes the emergence of an independent, black-led resistance a second time, when the Boys

are brought to the death chamber. The 8<sup>th</sup> Boy, selected to be executed first on account of his defiance, is bound by cords to the electric chair while the other boys gather around, “*helplessly crouching back at the foot of the chair*”. Here commences the crisis of the drama. Mob voices shout from the audience, “Hang ‘em with a rope, / Burn ‘em in the chair. / Let ‘em choke.” The Boys pick up the chorus: “Burn us in the chair! / The chair! The Chair! / Burn us in the chair!” Whereupon the 8<sup>th</sup> Boy exclaims: “Burn me in the chair? / NO! / (*He breaks his bonds and rises tall and strong*) / NO! For me not so! / Let the meek and humble turn the other cheek— [ . . . ]” Only after this decisive moment are the Red Voices heard again, and only then merely to second the 8<sup>th</sup> Boy’s appeal: “Hear him speak! Hear him speak!” As the 8<sup>th</sup> Boy continues to lead both the other Boys and the Red Voices, his vision is strikingly Afro-centric in its militancy:

8<sup>th</sup> Boy:        All the world, listen!  
                       Beneath the wide sky  
                       In all the black lands  
                       will echo this cry:  
                       I will not die!

Boys:            We will NOT DIE! (Hughes, “Scottsboro” 46)

Only after the Boys smash the electric chair on stage, destroying by their own hands the play’s central symbol of racist domination, do the Red Voices and the Boys enter into a more equal partnership, the Reds from the audience proceeding to the stage, moving among the Boys, and holding their hands, alternating white and black characters. As the play moves into its final tableau, then, “*The white and black workers meet[ing] on the stage*”, where “*the ‘Internationale’ may be sung and the red flag raised,*” the drama has left many clues that

Hughes would trust the Communist movement only so long as blacks were leaders as well as followers, and only so long as black militants could exercise autonomy within their sphere. The final formulation of the struggle offered by the 8<sup>th</sup> Boy, taken up by the collective voice of the now-defiant defendants, might seem to be overridden by the Red Voices who move onto the stage to sing the “Internationale,” except that the closing stage direction is conditional, presenting options for the closing gestures of the play but not obligatory ones: The “Internationale” and the red flag “*may*” be sung and raised. While Thurston sees the “Internationale” as the final link in a chain of equivalences that affirms the leadership of the “International,” the stage direction quite pointedly indicates that the movement from black solidarity and black-and-red solidarity to solidarity with the International, or Comintern, is optional.

This emphasis upon black solidarity, first and foremost, is consistent throughout Hughes’s Scottsboro writings. Whereas, for example, William Maxwell is certainly right to highlight the despicable closing line of Hughes’s 1931 essay “Southern Gentlemen, White Prostitutes, Mill-Owners, and Negroes”—“who ever heard of raping a prostitute?”—the principal focus of that essay is not, after all, the misogynist triangle between white Communist men and black men. On the one hand, the essay offers not only the disturbing, misogynist throw-away line at its conclusion (which ought, indeed, to have been thrown away) but also a sociologically accurate and far more generous depiction of Bates and Price: “And incidentally,” Hughes writes about mid-way through this one-paragraph screed, “let the mill-owners of Huntsville begin to pay their women decent wages so they won’t need to be prostitutes.” On the other hand, the major contention of the essay is not the importance of white agency (whether to accuse, convict, or save the defendants) but the decisive political agency and therefore the

moral responsibility of “12 million Negroes in America.” Here is where Hughes’s focus remains for most of the essay:

But back to the dark millions—black and half-black, brown and yellow, with a gang of white fore-parents—like me. If these 12 million Negro Americans don’t raise such a howl that the doors of Kilbee Prison shake until the 9 youngsters come out, (and I don’t mean a polite howl, either) then let Dixie justice (blind and syphilitic as it may be) take its course, and let Alabama’s Southern gentlemen amuse themselves burning 9 young black boys till they’re dead in the State’s electric chair. (Hughes, “Southern Gentlemen”)

Given that at the time Hughes wrote this short piece the International Labor Defense was organizing mass demonstrations across America and other Communist groups were protesting around the world (and the NAACP was hiring Southern white-establishment lawyers and publicly wringing their hands over the Communist tactics), we may fairly conclude that Hughes’s call for a howl of protest was also a pitch for black participation in ILD mass action. But it is telling that Hughes’s essay, like his poem “Christ in Alabama” (appearing one column to the left in the very same issue of *Contempo*), does not so much as even allude to the political power of white proletarian men or of Communists to effect the freedom of the Scottsboro boys. The political agency projected here is not of black and white Communists fighting together, nor even of black Communists; it is rather of blacks rising *en masse* in spontaneous, outraged protest.

At the very moment, then, that the NAACP and the Communists were fighting over representation of the Scottsboro Boys, and formerly close associates Hughes and Du Bois were compelled to take sides—Hughes throwing his lot in with the Communists, Du Bois sticking

doggedly to a defense of the NAACP—the visions and the practical contingencies that the two were mapping out are strikingly similar. Both sought a black-led, semi-autonomous and social democratic movement; both were willing to affiliate with existing socialist parties only insofar as they put into practice their principles of racial egalitarianism, and only so long as they would genuinely respect the independent self-leadership of black America. Their chief difference was a matter of experience, for Du Bois had already judged, based on past dealings with socialists, that a black social democratic movement could not retain autonomy within white-led socialist parties. This conclusion would not be reached by Hughes for some ten years. Their chief political dilemma was a shared one—the lack of a genuine solidarity between black America and the socialist movement. Their responses to the dilemma look different, and are regarded differently by critics, largely because their institutional affiliations and dilemmas were reversed images of one another. Whereas Hughes fought for full recognition of black America within the socialism of the Comintern, Du Bois and his Young Turk colleagues fought for full recognition of socialism among the leaders and masses of black America. Although Hughes's association with the Communists in 1933 made it extremely unlikely that he would journey across the continent to attend the NAACP-sponsored Amenia conference, Du Bois was not mistaken, as he busied himself to maximize the number of conferees who would call for a new, black-centered social democratic politics in the NAACP, in hazarding an invitation to Hughes.

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