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THE DEVELOPMENT OF BRITISH MARXIST LITERARY
THEORY: TOWARD A GENETIC-FUNCTIONAL APPROACH
TO LITERARY CRITICISM.

Southern Illinois University, Ph.D., 1972
Language and Literature, general

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**THE DEVELOPMENT OF BRITISH MARXIST LITERARY THEORY:
TOWARD A GENETIC-FUNCTIONAL APPROACH
TO LITERARY CRITICISM**

by

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**A.B., University of California, Berkeley, 1964
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**A Dissertation Submitted in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

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in the Graduate School
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August, 1972**

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Entitled

The Development of British Marxist Literary Theory:

Toward a Genetic-Functional Approach

To Literary Criticism

be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Among the many people who have given me the intellectual stimulus and assistance needed to produce this study, I wish first to recognize the late Professor Hugh Duncan, who guided me in my thinking about the relationship between art and society, and Terry Kandall, who first introduced me to Marx. My debts to individual faculty members and especially to my Committee are too numerous to mention; however, I wish particularly to acknowledge the encouragement and criticism of my director, Professor Ted Boyle, without whose assistance this dissertation would never have been finished. I owe another debt of gratitude to an overworked but superb typist, Mrs. Kathryn Parrish. Finally, I wish to acknowledge the enormous debt which I owe to my wife, Mary Jane, who tirelessly worked in helping me to prepare this study and whose intellectual excellence serves as an ideal which continues to motivate me and on whose critical judgments I should have listened to more attentively than I did.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this dissertation is twofold. On the one hand, it is an attempt to survey, describe, and evaluate the influence Marxism has had and continues to have on British literary theory and criticism; on the other hand, it is speculative in that it attempts to come to terms with some of the central problems in Marxist criticism as it is generally practiced. Specifically, the problems cluster around two key terms--praxis and function--which are critical in any discussion of Marxism and Marxist literary theory. Marx and Engels argue that man is basically a creature of social action or praxis and that art, including literature, has an essential "function" in this action. Man does not simply "know" the world, he acts in it, and literature perfects the forms which make action possible. Truth or "reality" arises in man's struggle with his environment (social and natural), and truth must be validated in action. In his "Theses on Feuerbach," Marx insists that in all previous philosophies, "reality" was an epistemological problem; historical materialism, however, is based on the proposition that truth arises only "in practice," in action. By the same token, as part of

the "superstructure" of society, literature effects man's actions; as it is experienced, it enters into and alters man's consciousness. Literature is not simply a "reflection" of reality; it has a specific social function in determining the way in which men relate to one another and to their environment. The essential question for Marx and Engels is how literature functions in man's praxis.

Throughout their lives, Marx and Engels were extremely interested in all aspects of literature, the role of the artist, the act of creation, the role of literature in society, the relationship of literature and economics, etc., and in their writings, there are hundreds of remarks on almost every aspect of literary activity. Their statements are scattered, and they are often of a fragmentary nature; they do not form a complete whole or any rigorous system. However, in their comments on the creative act, on literature as a mode of ideology, on literature as propaganda ("tendentious literature"), it is evident that they were both interested in understanding how literature functioned in society.

Since the entire canon of Marx's and Engels' works has emerged in a gradual piecemeal fashion, certain distortions in their basic assumptions concerning literature are inevitable. As yet no one, aesthetician or critic, has tapped the full resources of Marxism as a world view or as a method of literary analysis. Instead of Marx's

original emphasis on praxis and function, Marxist critics have tended to approach literature from the point of view of establishing its relationship to "reality" and explaining its origins by reference to society's economic organization. Literature is evaluated on whether or not it constitutes a "true reflection" of social reality, and it is argued, for example, that since literature originates in society, it is impossible for a "decadent" bourgeois society to produce great literature. To be sure, this is an oversimplification; some Marxist critics are sophisticated and sensitive readers and are seldom guilty of such crude practices. However, the fact remains that approaching literature from an epistemological perspective--i.e., how literature functions as a system of knowledge about reality or society--or emphasizing the genetic approach by deriving literature from certain historical situations, ignores Marx's and Engels' main concern, the function of literature in social action.

Marx and Engels are themselves partially responsible for this state of affairs. While they often discussed the cognitive function of literature, they developed no methodological tools for dealing with the social function of literature. They had little to say about literature as communication; in fact they developed no theory of communication at all. They had almost nothing to say about symbols or the function of symbols in society.

Further, when they discussed literature, they discussed it almost entirely in terms of content rather than form (although their own dialectical philosophy makes the separation of form and content impossible). In general Marx and Engels saw literature in its social function as a form of ideology, but, as the Marxist linguist, Adam Schaff points out, Marxists have failed to develop a "scientific theory of propaganda". The situation is quite paradoxical: a field of social activity which is so closely connected with social and class struggle has been neglected by Marxist science for wrongly interpreted doctrinal reason."¹

The "doctrinal" problems are many, but the two which are most important for this study concern the relationship of language to the base (the forces of production and their attendant social relationships) and the superstructure (law, politics, philosophy, art, etc.) of society and the problem of functionalism in general. Because Marx and Engels developed no methodology to deal with symbols, their followers have had a difficult time in coming to grips with the nature and function of language. To this date, Marxists are still arguing whether or not language is part of the base or part of the superstructure of

¹Adam Schaff, Introduction to Semantics, trans. Olgierd Wojtasiewicz (London: Pergamon Press, 1962), p. 364.

society.² The concepts of function and functionalism have proved to be even more of a problem. Marx unquestionably believed that literature served some sort of function, but Marxism as a world-view has been traditionally anti-functional in its methodology. The reasons for this are complex, but one could say that for the most part, Marxism is a philosophy based on the idea of revolutionary change. By contrast, functionalism, as it has developed in classical sociology and anthropology, in the work of such men as Durkheim and Malinowski, is based on the idea of adaptation, equilibrium; historically, it has been a rather static model, in contrast to Marx's basic assumption of historical change. It has been only in recent years that Marxists have made a genuine attempt to confront the problem of functionalism.³

These doctrinal questions are particularly sharp when one examines the relationship between Marxist sociology and Western "academic" sociology, but the similar problems are apparent when one comes to discuss the development of Marxist literary criticism. Despite the emphasis that Marx and Engels gave to the functional approach to literature, no Marxist critic has worked out

²Cf. Alvin Gouldner, The Coming Crisis of Western Sociology (New York: Avon Books, 1971), pp. 452-455.

³Gouldner, pp. 459-463.

a rigorous and systematic theory of the social function of literature. In addition, what work has been done in this area has not come from the Soviet Union, the Soviet Bloc, or from the Continental Marxists, but from England and the United States.

The development of Marxist literary criticism in England constitutes a significant chapter in the development of Marxist literary criticism. It was in England that many of Marx's and Engels' major ideas were first used to discuss the relationship between literature and society. William Morris was the first artist of real reputation to apply Marx's ideas to formulate a general theory of the relationship between art and society. His influence on later Marxists can scarcely be overestimated, and he anticipated almost all of the major issues involved in the genetic approach to literature from a Marxist perspective. Moreover, he was the first critic to articulate Marx's demand that art and work should not stand in opposition to each other but that all of man's life activities should be judged by aesthetic standards.

Morris based most of his views on his own work as an artist and his active participation in the revolutionary Socialist movements of his time. His approach to art is historical but essentially non-functional. He did not see literature as having a specific social function in its own right; from his point of view, literature was passively

dependent on the social arrangement of society, which, in turn, was determined ultimately by economic conditions. In one sense, this is the traditional Marxist interpretation as it has been described in the preceding discussion. However, Morris does not put himself in the position of having to judge literature and art by whether or not they give a "true reflection" of social reality. Intuitively, he realized that this approach misses the real nature of literature. When he was criticized for not giving a "true" and detailed picture of the future in his utopian novel, News From Nowhere, he replied that the issue was not whether News From Nowhere was true but whether his utopian novel made people desire to create that kind of future. Although he did not develop a functional theory of literature, he knew that literature did have a function.

After Morris, Marxist theory remained on the periphery of British literary thought until the 1930's. In the Thirties, British Marxist critics elaborated on many of the ideas first enunciated by Morris and combined them with Marxist theories emanating from Russia (especially those of Plekhanov, Trotsky and Lenin). In addition, there was a distinct attempt by critics such as Alick West to develop ways of thinking about the social function of literature based on a consideration of art as a system of action. West argued against the conception of language

as a mode of perception and insisted that language was a mode of action and an instrument for social control. The development of a theory of the social function of literature culminates in the work of Christopher Caudwell, the first Marxist critic to attempt a rigorous and systematic theory of the social function of literature. Caudwell's achievement is all the more remarkable when one takes into account the ambiguous relationship between Marxism and functionalism. Caudwell's significance lies in his attempt to assimilate the work of functionalists such as Durkheim and Malinowski into a Marxist framework.

It should not be surprising that Caudwell's attempt was not entirely successful. Not only is Marxism equivocal in its relationship to functionalism, but the whole tradition of social theory in England is opposed to thinking of function along the lines articulated in the works of Durkheim, Pareto and Weber. Only in British anthropology did functionalism take hold. Caudwell's theory of poetry is derived from a model of functionalism based on anthropological observations of various primitive cultures and not on the function of literature in modern, industrial, mass societies. In addition, following Malinowski, Caudwell tended to see poetry as a form of magic. Consequently, his methods and models are of limited use for the contemporary Marxist critic who is interested in discovering ways to think about the function of literature in modern society.

The object of this study, then, is to survey and evaluate Marxism's influence on British literary criticism as British Marxist critics move toward a theory of the social function of literature. These critics are significant because they demonstrate what is Marxism's most distinctive contribution to literary theory and criticism. In the next section of this study I describe and interpret what seem to be the major tenets of Marxism and its assumption concerning the relationship between art and society. My reasons for including such a lengthy discussion are many, but primarily they are based on the view that before one can criticize what other Marxists are neglecting in developing a Marxist approach to literature, one is obligated to demonstrate what there is in the works of Marx and Engels originally. In the third section, I discuss the work of William Morris as the first major Marxist aesthetician and his articulation of a general theory of the relationship between art and society. The fourth section concentrates on examining the reemergence of British Marxist criticism in the Thirties exemplified by the work of R. D. Charques, Philip Henderson, Ralph Fox, and Alick West. Influenced by the Russian critics and the increasing availability of Marx and Engels' works, and the particular historical situation in which they found themselves, these critics not only elaborate on Morris' basic ideas concerning the relationship between art and society, but

become increasingly concerned with the social function of literature, particularly the role of literature in creating a socialist society. The fifth section focuses on the work of Christopher Caudwell. He is not only the most brilliant of the British Marxist critics, but in Studies in a Dying Culture, Further Studies in a Dying Culture, and Illusion and Reality, he is the first Marxist to attempt a complete theory of literature's function in society. The final section of this study is an attempt to understand why Caudwell's work has made little impact on Modern British criticism, including Marxist criticism. I examine some historical problems raised by a functionalist methodology in Britain, and some of the problems in Caudwell's own writing. By considering certain aspects of the work of William Empson and L. C. Knights, I suggest ways in which Caudwell's initial observations might have been improved. Finally, I suggest that it is only by assimilating some of the methods and theories of two American thinkers--Kenneth Burke and Hugh Duncan--that Marxists will be able to develop a viable methodology for understanding the social function of literature.

It may be objected that as an approach to literary problems, Marxism has simply not had much significance for British literary theory. It seems to me that this position is untenable. Even if literary critics had read in no language but their own and had had no contact with other

European thinkers, from as early as 1845, they would have been exposed to the work of Marx and Engels. From about 1850 to 1890, in addition to having some of their works translated into English, Marx and Engels were publishing articles in at least thirty-five different English newspapers (as well as six American newspapers).

Moreover, beginning in the late 1880's and continuing to the present, certain tenets of Marxism have directly and indirectly influenced the course of literary criticism. One has only to think of figures such as Morris, Oscar Wilde, George Bernard Shaw, Christopher Caudwell, the Auden group, the "New Left Critics," Richard Hoggart, Arnold Kettle, Herbert Read, and Raymond Williams to appreciate the intellectual stimulus furnished by Marxism. In the '30's Britain was the center for Marxist literary criticism. It was during that period that, as one critic points out, "English Marxist criticism became more than partisan; it became profound."⁴

Beyond this, it would seem almost impossible to understand many of the assumptions of modern literary criticism unless one understands its relationship with Marxist literary theory. For example, it is significant to know that F. R. Leavis and many of the people around him on Scrutiny were quite consciously anti-Marxist, and

⁴Cf. Samuel Hynes, "Introduction" to Christopher Caudwell's Romance and Realism: A Study in Bourgeois Literature (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), p. 16.

an awareness that Leavis was anti-Marxist in his criticism is valuable in explaining the kind of criticism he was and is writing and the methodological assumptions behind that criticism.

Indeed, in any complete discussion of British literary theory encompassing the year 1880 to the present, a consideration of Marxism cannot be avoided. Whatever one thinks about the character and ideas of Marx and Engels and their subsequent interpreters, it is a fact that they have exercised a profound influence on all areas of social, economic, political, and intellectual life. Marx is one of the great figures of the nineteenth century, and Marxism is still a vital force. In his Search for a Method, Sartre argues that Marxism is still the philosophy of our time, for at this historical juncture, we have not transcended the conditions that called Marxism into being.

One is all the more astonished, then, to find that no major attempt has been made to describe and evaluate Marxism's contribution to the history of English literary criticism and the value of the method to literary criticism as a whole. Although Peter Demetz, in Marx, Engels and the Poets: Origins of Marxist Literary Criticism (originally published in German as Marx, Engels und die Dichter, Stuttgart, 1959), discusses the influence of German nineteenth century radicalism on Marxist literary theory and investigates the relationship between Carlyle

and Engels, he devotes only one paragraph to other English Marxist literary critics. Donald Egbert's Social Radicalism and the Arts (New York, 1970) is primarily, as the author indicates, a cultural history from the French Revolution to 1968. It concentrates on painting, and it touches on only a few of the more important literary critics in Western Europe. David Margolies' study of Christopher Caudwell--The Function of Literature: A Study of Christopher Caudwell's Aesthetics (New York, 1969)--is valuable in providing an insight into one English Marxist's unique contribution to the concept of the social "function" of art. It does not, however, deal with Caudwell's specific criticism of writers, nor does it place him in a tradition of English Marxist criticism, something that Stanley Edgar Hyman does, to a degree, in the first edition of The Armed Vision. Other than the studies mentioned above, there is very little work and virtually no systematic work on Marxism and literary criticism.⁵

There are many reasons for this. A complete account in English of the thoughts of Marx and Engels on aesthetics does not exist. Only one monograph--Mikhail Lifshits' The Philosophy of Art of Karl Marx (New York, 1938)--explores some of the fundamental problems. And the small

⁵For a valuable summary of what has been done, see Stefan Morawski, "The Aesthetic Views of Marx and Engels," JAAC, XXVIII, No. 3 (Spring, 1970), 301-302.

volume issued by International Publishers, Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, Literature and Art (New York, 1947) is incomplete and lacks commentary. Even more important and more fundamental to the problem of establishing a Marxian aesthetic is that not all of Marx's and Engels' writings have been published, and what has been is not fully translated into English. For example, Marx's Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844, which contain numerous references to the arts, were not published in English until 1959 (these manuscripts were not discovered until 1932). Further, although a substantial part of Marx's and Engels' correspondence has been published, most of it has not been translated into English. What has been translated has, for the most part, come only after a long lapse in time between its composition and its entrance into English. The lack of a standard English edition of the complete works of Marx and Engels is a major obstacle for scholars in assessing their influence. The same situation holds true for the works of some of Marxism's more profound interpreters, particularly those who have developed aesthetic theories from their studies of Marxism.

Another major difficulty one encounters in trying to assess Marxism's contribution to literary criticism is the problem of distinguishing between Marxism and other forms of "radicalism" (anarchism, Left Hegelianism,

syndicalism, Leninism, etc.). Marxism itself is described by many as a synthesis of German philosophy, French radicalism, and English political theory. Certainly, England was not immune to various forms of radicalism; in fact, the meaning of radical, in the sense of social radicalism (rather than "something new") originated in late eighteenth century England as the effects of the Industrial Revolution began to be felt. One need only think of Carlyle and his discussion of the "cash-nexus," the "condition of England," and the French Revolution and of Engels' translation of Carlyle into German to realize how difficult it is to separate Marxism from native English radicalism. Indeed, it has been argued that Marx's Inaugural Address (1864), delivered to the Working Men's International at St. Martin's Hall in London is the Charter of Social Democracy under which England is governed today. The distinctions are complex and often almost impossible to achieve.

What one discovers is that there are several "Marxisms," depending on which historical moment one focuses on. And within a particular historical interval, one is likely to find a variety of ways in which Marxist concepts are being used to theorize about and to interpret literature. (This, of course, would substantiate one of the crucial assumptions of Marxian theories of interpretation, i.e., the radical historicism of interpretation.) Without being too schematic or arbitrary, one can determine

that Marxism and its relationship to literature can be divided into three rather distinct historical periods, with the distinctions based on the way in which various critics interpreted Marx. Roughly, these periods are: I. 1880-1914; II. 1918-1940; III. 1940 to the present. These periods correspond approximately to three generations of critics and three historical phases that the interpretation of Marxism as a whole has undergone.

In the first period, Marxism is only one of a number of radical critiques of bourgeois society (i.e., Western Civilization) and of capitalism as the economic system of that society. Social democratic Marxism is competing at this time with a variety of socialisms, anarchism, and syndicalism as they tend to be merged with the native English radical tradition as conceptual tools to analyze the relationship between art and society. This situation is probably best seen in the writing of William Morris. After the first World War and the events which led to the Russian Revolution, "orthodox" Marxism becomes that of Engels and his followers, including Lenin. Marxism becomes "self-conscious" and critics begin to emphasize its revolutionary aspects, its description of the situation of the writer in bourgeois society, and his role in assisting the proletarian revolution. These ideas can be seen in the work of R. D. Charques, Philip Henderson, and Ralph Fox. There are numerous debates concerning the

social origin and function of literature and, toward the end of the period, Marxist critics begin to consider literature and literary criticism as political weapons in the fight against fascism. Much of this criticism is based not so much on the writings of Marx, but on his interpreters. Christopher Caudwell's Illusion and Reality (1937), while not the most representative is probably the best Marxist criticism of the time. After World War II, with the beginning of the Cold War, the proclaiming of the "end of ideology," (e.g., Daniel Bell's The End of Ideology), and the rise of sophisticated new techniques of literary analysis, Marxism as a method of interpretation practically disappears. In the late 1950's, however, with the growth of the "New Left," the publication of Marx's Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844, and with the influence of the French existentialist-Marxists and Marxist-structuralists, the reemergence and growth of a "new Marxist criticism seems inevitable. In view of the recent attacks on the assumptions of formalism, Marxism's reappearance as a method of literary analysis is even more significant.

It is the fundamental thesis of this study that a Marxist orientation can be a fruitful and productive methodology for literary criticism. But it seems to me evident that in the years between the work of William Morris and that of Christopher Caudwell, Marxist criticism

has taken a wrong turn. Partly because of some of the statements of Marx and Engels themselves and partly through ignorance, misinterpretation and, at times, outright distortion by interpreters, much too much emphasis has been given to the "origins" of art and its "reflection" of some kind of socio-economic "reality." Not nearly enough attention has been devoted to the implications Marxism has for the discussion of the role of the artist, the creative act, the work of art itself, the audience, the social function of art, the critic, the act of interpretation, and criticism itself or the criteria by which art must be judged. It is to William Morris' credit that he focuses on the artistic act itself and tries to relate it to other activities; in this effort he is closer to Marx than any of Marx's later interpreters. Christopher Caudwell also tries to relate artistic activity to other social acts, and he goes beyond Morris in trying to understand the function of literature in society. However, between the time of Morris and Caudwell, Marxism becomes "scientific." Like science, Marxism becomes thought of as a way of "knowing" about society, and literature is seen to be something that gives man some special knowledge (a "reflection" of reality) about society and social relationships; hence, literature comes to be judged in terms of its accurate reflection of the "truth," specifically Marxian "truth." Marxism comes to be interpreted more and

more in epistemological terms rather than as a philosophy of action (praxis). It is with this emphasis, it seems to me, that Marxism and Marxist literary criticism takes its wrong turn.

In the final section of this study, I suggest that Marxism and Marxist literary criticism must reclaim the category of action, not knowledge, as a perspective for thinking about man in society and for relating society and literature. In addition, I suggest that the most fruitful metaphor for discussing human action is not a scientific one but a poetic one--the "dramatistic" metaphor (as exemplified in the writings of Kenneth Burke and Hugh Duncan). I also argue that this is not a departure from Marx, for this is exactly what Marx does in practically all of his writings. Finally, I suggest that the viability and effectiveness of future Marxist criticism will be determined by whether or not Marxism can be integrated with present and developing theories of symbolic action.

CHAPTER II

MARXISM AND THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LITERATURE AND SOCIETY: A BASIC INVENTORY OF IDEAS

Marx and Engels left no systematic account of their views on art, but, as Mikhail Lifshitz says: "In dealing with questions of art and culture, the importance of Marxist theory would be immense even if nothing were known about the aesthetic views of the founders of Marxism. Fortunately, however, this is not the case."¹ Lifshitz himself made the first collection, in Russian, of Marx and Engels' specific observations on literature and art.² In this section, in order to anticipate and understand some of the major influences of Marxism on British critical theory, I am going to attempt to summarize some of the main elements of a Marxian aesthetic based on the essays and remarks of Marx and Engels on art and literature. Moreover, I will attempt to derive from

¹Mikhail Lifshitz, The Philosophy of Art of Karl Marx, trans. Ralph B. Winn and ed. Angel Flores, No. 7 (New York: Critics Group, 1938), p. 6.

²Obiskusstvje, ed. A. Lunacharski, M. Lifshitz and F. P. Shiller (Moscow, 1933).

Marxism as a "world view" what I consider to be certain major aesthetic and critical concepts which are implicit in that world view. The absence of a comprehensive aesthetic constructed by either Marx or Engels should not serve as the sole criterion for judging their contribution. Perhaps a more reasonable standard "would be the originality of the contribution in its own time, and its influence on theory, criticism, and even artistic creativity in the future. By this test the aesthetic ideas of Marx and Engels have historical and theoretical importance."³

The task of investigating Marx and Engels' contribution to literature and criticism will be divided into two major sections: I. a general introduction, biographical and critical in nature, emphasizing Marx and Engels' orientation and attitudes toward literature and aesthetics as seen in their early literary efforts and in the style, themes, and structure of their later works; II. a general synthesis of Marx and Engels' views on literature and aesthetics based on statements of theirs dealing with literature and criticism. More importantly, this second section will deal with crucial concepts, explicit and implicit in Marxism as a world view which have important bearing on literature, criticism, and the development of British literary theory. Before proceeding,

³Stefan Morawski, "The Aesthetic Views of Marx and Engels," JAAC, 28 (1970), 314.

however, certain assumptions and methodological problems should be clarified. To begin with, it is not the task of this study to determine once and for all the validity of Marx and Engels' views. This study is more concerned with how other artists and critics interpreted Marxism than it is with whether or not Marxism offers the only valid solution to the problems which will be discussed.

Despite the Soviet insistence that Marxism represents a scientific system of thought, more and more scholars are beginning to see Marx as a "moralist or a religious kind of thinker."⁴ My own prejudice leads me to treat Marx (and Engels, to a lesser degree) as a moral philosopher located in the tradition of the great nineteenth-century thinkers such as Carlyle, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and Kierkegaard. As Eric Fromm argues,

Marx was seeking an answer to the meaning of life, but could not accept the traditional religious answer that this can be found only through belief in the existence of God. In this he belongs to the same tradition as the Enlightenment thinkers, from Spinoza to Goethe, who rejected the old theological concepts and were searching for a new spiritual frame of orientation. . . . Authentic Marxism was perhaps the strongest spiritual movement of a broad, nontheistic nature in nineteenth-century Europe.⁵

⁴Robert Tucker, Philosophy and Myth in Karl Marx (London: Cambridge University Press, 1961), p. 12.

⁵Erich Fromm, ed., Socialist Humanism: An International Symposium (Garden City, New York: Anchor, 1966), pp. ix-x.

Although "Marx was aloof or hostile all his life to everything Jewish," many writers, including George Bernard Shaw, H. M. Hyndman, and John Middleton Murry, see Marx in a role analogous to that of a Biblical prophet. Waldo Frank writes that "Marx is a traditional Jewish prophet who must be interpreted like Moses or Isaiah,"⁶ and Stuart Hughes sees in Marx "an image of Marx the nineteenth-century scientist at war with Marx the Old Testament prophet."⁷ One need not go to this extreme in order to consider Marx, legitimately, as a moral philosopher. Eugene Kamenka argues that,

Marx's own ethical impulse stems from Rousseau and Kant and the ethic of German romanticism; his roots lie in an important ethical and intellectual tradition. As Marx the philosopher became somewhat submerged beneath Marx the social scientist this ethical impulse was to some extent hidden from view by accretions from other sources--by the materialist critique of moralities, by Darwinian strains, by a concentration on material needs that bore a superficial resemblance to utilitarianism.⁸

Like Nietzsche and Carlyle, Marx is obsessed with a vision that will not submit to what Carlyle calls "dryasdust analysis"; Marx is not a moral philosopher in the sense that he assumes that the nature of good and evil

⁶ Stanley Edgar Hyman, The Tangled Bank: Darwin, Marx, Frazer and Freud As Imaginative Writers (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1959), pp. 142-43.

⁷ H. Stuart Hughes, Consciousness and Society: The Reorientation of European Social Thought, 1890-1930 (New York: Vintage, 1958), p. 70.

⁸ Eugene Kamenka, Marxism and Ethics (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1969), p. 2.

for man is problematic; on the contrary, with Marx, ethics are not a subject of inquiry, questions of right conduct "are not raised by Marx as questions."⁹ Tucker argues that Marx is a moralist of the religious rather than the philosophic kind:

In general, men who create myths or religious conceptions of reality are moralists in [the religious sense]. . . . They may in fact be obsessed with a moral vision of reality, a vision of the world as an arena of conflict between good and evil forces. If so, ethical inquiry is entirely foreign to their mental makeup. For them there is no possibility of the suspension of commitment that ethical inquiry presupposes. They are passionately committed persons. The good and evil forces in the world are presented before their mind's eye with such overwhelming immediacy, and the conclusions for conduct follow with such compelling force, that ethical inquiry must seem to them pointless or even perverse. It is to this class of minds, . . . that Karl Marx's belongs.¹⁰

It seems to me that what Marx presents is a vision, and, as Stanley Edgar Hyman argues: "One cannot refute a vision, although one can replace it by another vision, as we now see the universe through Einstein's eyes rather than through Newton's."¹¹ And perhaps the "truth" of a vision is not amenable to the truth of empirical evidence or the validity of a logical proposition. As one philosopher writes,

The interpreter today cannot, without a new ground in objectivity . . . and a new definition of truth,

⁹Tucker, Philosophy and Myth, p. 16.

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 21-22.

¹¹Hyman, The Tangled Bank, p. 447.

see the nature of what is meant here by disclosure of truth. Truth must not be conceived as a correspondence of statement to "fact"; truth is the dynamic emergence of being into the light of manifestness. Truth is never total or unambiguous; the emergence into "unconcealment" is rather the simultaneous covering up of truth in its inexhaustible fullness. Truth is grounded in negativity; this is the reason that the discovery of truth proceeds best within a dialectic in which the power of negativity can operate. The emergence of truth in hermeneutical experience comes in that encounter with negativity which is intrinsic to experience; . . . Truth is not conceptual, not fact--it happens.¹²

Moreover, although there is an epistemology in Marxism, Marx is concerned less with epistemology than he is with action. Marxism is involved not so much with the problem of how man "knows" the world but how he "acts" in history and interacts with nature and his fellow men. It is less a philosophy of perception than it is a philosophy of action (praxis), a vision of how man's actions create history by changing nature, his fellow man, and himself in an ongoing dialectical process.

Another methodological problem, and one that is crucial to any discussion of Marx's views on literature and criticism, is the position one takes in regard to Marx's early writing, particularly up to the years 1844-45. Since 1932, with the publication of Marx's Economic and

¹²Richard E. Palmer, Hermeneutics: Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, and Gadamer (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1969), p. 245.

Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844,¹³ there has been a heated debate between those who insist on the continuity of all of Marx's thought and those who wish to "rescue Marx from the perils of his youth."¹⁴ The problem stems from Marx's early humanism and his obvious debt to Hegel. Althusser describes Marx's early work in its relation to his later work as "the relation between the enslaved thought of young Marx and the free thought of [the later] Marx."¹⁵ On the other hand, Engels insisted on Marx's continued indebtedness to Hegel. In a review of Marx's Critique of Political Economy, Engels argues that "Hegel's dialectic . . . was scarcely less important in Marx's position than the economic basis of society." As Loyd Easton and Kurt Guddat put it, "With all his criticism of Hegel, . . . Marx retained an essential aspect of his thought--the dialectic of reason in history--and grafted it onto the empiricism he took from Feuerbach in criticism of speculative 'mysticism.'"¹⁶

¹³ First published in Marx-Engels, Gesamtausgabe, Abt. I, Bd. 3 [Collected Works, Sec. I, Vol. 3] (Berlin, 1932).

¹⁴ Louis Althusser, For Marx, trans. Ben Brewster (London: Penguin, 1969), p. 53.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 83.

¹⁶ Writings of the Young Marx on Philosophy and Society, ed. and trans. Loyd D. Easton and Kurt H. Guddat (Garden City, New York: Anchor, 1967), p. 25. Hereafter cited as Easton and Guddat.

Not only is Hegel's influence pervasive from beginning to end in both Marx and Engels, but so is Marx's concept of alienation. Erich Fromm demonstrates the continuity of Marx's thought in this respect, arguing that "Marx's philosophy, like much of existentialist thinking, represents a protest against man's alienation, his loss of himself and his transformation into a thing; it is a movement against the dehumanization and automatization of man inherent in the development of Western industrialism."¹⁷ And while it is true that Fromm omits much of the 1844 Manuscript that deals with economics and the class struggle, Fromm recognizes, quite rightly I think, the "unity of thought that connects the young and mature Marx."¹⁸ (The essential unity of Marx's work does not, or should not, imply that it is a total, comprehensive and finished system; nor does the suggestion of unity negate the possibility of evolution and development.) Like the concept of alienation, "the theory of man as a being of praxis is not a discovery of the 'old' Marx; we find it in a developed form in the 'young' one. The 'young' and the 'old' Marx are essentially

¹⁷ Erich Fromm, Marx's Concept of Man, With a Translation from Marx's Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts by T. B. Bottomore (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1961), p. v.

¹⁸ Dirk J. Struik, "Introduction," in Karl Marx, The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844, trans. Martin Milligan, ed. Dirk J. Struik (New York: International Publishers, 1964), p. 52.

one and the same: . . ."¹⁹

Because Marx's early works have such an important bearing on his writings about literature and art, it is necessary to clarify how they should be treated and into what framework they should be put--since any method is, at the same time, an interpretation--; my position is essentially the same as that of Hendrik de Man, who in the same year that the first full texts of the Manuscripts were published (1932) wrote, "If Marxism is conceived as a living force, rather than being restricted to a dogma or system, and if its origin is not treated separately from Marx's personality, or the history of its transformations from the steadily changing world and the resultant objectives, then the Marx of 1844 belongs to Marxism just as the Marx of 1867, and certainly the Engels of 1890."²⁰

The third and final methodological problem which should be dealt with here is the question of whether or not one may justifiably equate the views of Engels with those of Marx. Some scholars have made sharp divisions and contrasts between Marx's ideas and those elements of

¹⁹ Gajo Petrovic, Marx in the Mid-Twentieth Century: A Yugoslav Philosopher Considers Karl Marx's Writings (Garden City, New York: Anchor, 1967), p. 32.

²⁰ Hendrik de Man, "Der neu entdeckte Marx," in Der Kampf (Vienna, 1932), pp. 224-229, 267-277, cited by Adam Schaff, Marxism and the Human Individual, trans. Olgierd Wojtasiewicz, ed. Robert S. Cohen, intro. Erich Fromm (New York: McGraw Hill, 1970), p. 18. Schaff's italics.

Marxism which were added by Engels, particularly those added after Marx's death. Indeed, George Lichtheim convincingly argues that Engels' main contribution to Marxism, dialectical materialism (expounded most fully in his Dialectics of Nature, which Engels began in 1872 and put aside in 1883, after Marx's death, to work on the manuscript of Capital), in which mathematics and the physical world are shown to partake of the dialectical process is essentially foreign to the "original Marxian" philosophy. Lichtheim noted a "fatal flaw" in Engels' dialectical materialism:

. . . if nature is conceived in materialist terms it does not lend itself to the dialectical method, and if the dialectic is read back into nature, materialism goes by the board. Because he knew this, or sensed it, Marx wisely left nature (other than human nature) alone.²¹

For Marx, "the only nature relevant to the understanding of history is human nature."²²

Engels' dialectical materialism "set the tone for a generation of Socialists, and his interpretation of Marxism acquired cononical status. In due course his philosophy--notably as set out in the Dialectics of Nature--became the cornerstone of the Soviet Marxist edifice. There is no mistaking the line of descent which runs from

²¹George Lichtheim, Marxism: An Historical and Critical Study (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1961), p. 247.

²²Ibid., p. 245.

Engels, via Plekhanov and Kautsky, to Lenin and Bukharin."²³

Except for the Dialectics of Nature, however, the overwhelming majority of Engels' work depends less heavily on his idea of dialectical materialism and appears quite consistent with Marx's writings; indeed, one of Marx's "most popular and famous" collection of journalistic articles, Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Germany in 1848, was discovered to be wholly written by Engels. Moreover, Engels' own Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844 (published in 1845) foreshadows, in content and tone, much of what Marx incorporates into Capital. As one writer argues, "In a real sense, every work either of them wrote was a collaboration. For more than a decade after Marx's death, Engels released new writings by Marx to the world, reinterpreted old ones with new prefaces, and himself wrote at least one book, The Origin of the Family, that carries Marx's imaginative vision some distance further. Engels' own writings are an essential part of the picture [i.e., for an account of Marxism]."²⁴

On aesthetic matters, their views are even closer, and they seem to be in basic agreement on all matters of fundamental importance. From the beginning, as Stefan

²³ Ibid., pp. 245-46.

²⁴ Hyman, The Tangled Bank, p. 162.

Morawski argues,

. . . their early writings indicate converging trends of intellectual development; and with the beginning of their lifelong intimate collaboration (September 1844), their aesthetic views interpenetrated. One can speak confidently of the coalescence of their major aesthetic ideas, a unity of approach, while noting that their temperaments were not identical and that each had special interests. Thus is explained their individual accent on some topics and problems. Marx was more enthusiastic about abstract thinking, and the more systematic Engels was the more sensitive and spontaneous. Marx was university trained. The brilliant Engels was largely self-educated. Marx's ideal, as Cornu characterizes it [in A. Cornu, Karl Marx et Friedrich Engels, la vie et leur oeuvres (Paris, 1954-62)], was Prometheus; and Engels's, Siegfried of the Nibelungenlied. But the coalescence of their approaches is evident, especially in the two major critiques--E. Sue's The Mysteries of Paris (in The Holy Family, 1845) and F. Lassalle's drama Franz von Sickingen (see the 1859 correspondence with the author)--where their views coincide although they were not writing their analyses in direct consultation.²⁵

In this study, then, when I speak of Marxism, I am speaking of both Marx and Engels, and I am assuming that as far as aesthetic matters are concerned, they are in fundamental agreement.

The Centrality of the Aesthetic for Marx and Engels

Countless literary studies are made attempting to relate one area of a writer's life or work to his writing; for example, there are studies relating James Joyce's rejection of the priesthood and his conception of the role of the artist as a "literary" priest, Conrad's life

²⁵Morawski, "The Aesthetic Views of Marx and Engels," p. 302.

at sea and its influence on his fiction, the apprenticeship in journalism and its effect on Ernest Hemingway's prose style, etc. All of these approaches assume that since writing involves the total personality, all areas of a man's life are somehow relevant to his imaginative vision. However, there have been relatively few studies of this phenomenon as it appears in reverse. That is to say, what happens when a man of literature devotes his energy to other activities? What effect does the role of a poet have on Stevens the insurance agent or Williams the doctor? How does the role of novelist influence Disraeli's practice of politics? or Winston Churchill's? The point that I am trying to make and the argument that is important for this study is this: whatever else they later became, Marx and Engels began their careers as poets and literary critics. Moreover, it is my contention that they never abandoned this interest in literature and that their interest in the works of the imagination had a profound impact on the form and content of their world view; indeed, as one critic puts it, "We have concluded that in general the aesthetic thought of Marx and Engels is integral with their world view."²⁶ Or, as another Marxist philosopher argues, ". . . the conception of aesthetics is the touchstone of the interpretation of Marxism."²⁷

²⁶ Ibid., p. 304.

²⁷ Roger Garaudy, Marxism in the Twentieth Century, trans. René Hague (New York: Scribners, 1970), p. 175.

Both Marx and Engels began their literary efforts in spite of certain misgivings from their parents. With Engels, perhaps, the opposition was stronger. Peter Demetz writes that Engels "was forced to find his way to literature and criticism against the will of his parents and the religious beliefs of his early youth."²⁸ Interestingly, Engels' early poetry shows the influence of the "traditional German Protestant hymn" which emphasizes the influence of his family in his early thought.²⁹ Engels' family wanted him to study law and international trade in the hope that he might become a partner in his father's cotton business. At the age of seventeen, however, with one more year of study needed in order to graduate, Engels withdrew from the Gymnasium; since he apparently was not

²⁸ Peter Demetz, Marx, Engels, and the Poets: Origins of Marxist Literary Criticism, trans. Jeffrey Sammons, revised and enlarged edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), p. 10. This work is based upon the author's Marx, Engels und die Dichter (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt GmbH., 1959) which is the result of the author's dissertation done for the Department of Comparative Literature, Yale University, 1956, under the direction of René Wellek. It is a valuable work, especially for the historical background it provides concerning The Young Germany and the Young Hegelian literary movements and the information it brings together indicating Marx's and Engels' relationships with these movements and their initial literary efforts. It is, however, vitiated by a never-thoroughly examined assumption of the autonomy of art and aesthetics. For two reviews which point to this as well as to several other problems in Demetz's work see Lee Baxandall, "Marx and Anti-Marx," Partisan Review (Winter, 1968), 152-156; Norman Rudich, "Review," College English, 31, No. 4 (January, 1970), 424-430.

²⁹ Demetz, loc. cit.

going to prepare for a law career, his father worked to prepare him for a business career. As one historian observes:

Engels may have become reconciled to a business apprenticeship because he saw that it would not seriously interfere with his real, inner interest, the writing of poetry.³⁰

Peter Demetz, in his Marx, Engels, and the Poets, describes Engels' early literary career, his poetry and his journalism, the men, such as Karl Gutzkow (1811-1878), novelist, dramatist, essayist, literary historian, critic and publisher (who first published Engels, writing under the pseudonym, "S. Oswald"), and Ludwig Borne (1796-1837) (who, in his Dramaturgical Leaflets--1835--argued that literature must be seen from a political perspective), and Engels' association with the "Young Germany" movement (a loosely knit group of writers that began in the 1830's to focus on the relationship between the artist and society) and the philosophical radicalism of the Young Hegelians.³¹ As several critics have observed, Engels' poetry was not very good. In one poem, "An Evening" (Ein Abend), which appeared in August, 1840 in the Telegraph fur Deutschland, the speaker in the poem identifies

³⁰Oscar J. Hammen, The Red '48ers: Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (New York: Scribner, 1969), pp. 31-32.

³¹Demetz, pp. 9ff. Engels read Ludwig Borne's Dramaturgical Leaflets in 1838, and in the spring of 1839 he read Strauss's Life of Jesus; by the winter of 1840, he was studying Hegel.

himself as a disciple of Ludwig Borne rebelling against the oppression he finds in Germany:

And I too am one of the free bards;
It is the oak Borne upon whose branches
I have climbed, when in the valley the oppressors
Have pulled their chains still more tightly around
Germany;

Yes, I am one of the bold birds
Who sail on the ethereal sea of freedom,
And I would rather be a sparrow among them
Than a nightingale, were I obliged to lie in a cage
And serve a prince with my song.

.
And then will appear a Calderon, a new one,
A pearl fisher in the sea of poetry,
His song, the sacrificial fires from high stacks of
aromatic cedar,
Will flame with images, his song, his golden lyre
Will roar about the bloody destruction of the tyrant.³²

As Demetz argues, "It is a work of rhetorical enthusiasm, not of poetic intensity; in its clichés, its artistic incompetence, and its mixed metaphors, it represents the third-rate poetry of the pre-revolutionary youth movement."³³

Moreover, Engels himself would probably have agreed, for as to his own talents, Engels was under no illusions. Almost two years before the publication of this poem and before his eighteenth birthday, he writes a letter to a friend stating that after reading Goethe's reflections on writing in "For Young Poets," he was "cured . . . of all belief in any poetic mission. . . . Still he would retain it [i.e., writing poetry] as 'an agreeable supplement,'

³²Demetz, pp. 22-23. Demetz's translation.

³³Ibid., p. 21.

as Goethe said, and now and then submit a poem for publication, 'because other fellows who are just as big or even bigger fools than I am have done it, and because I shall neither raise nor lower the levels of German literature thereby.'"³⁴

Engels soon realized that he lacked significant imaginative talent and, like Marx, turned to prose, criticism, and journalism. But he never abandoned his love of metaphor, image, and of words as such or his interest in artistic problems. After Marx's death, Engels spent much of his time in linguistic studies; he taught himself Russian, the Slavic languages, Persian, and some oriental languages, the Germanic languages--Gothic, Old Norse, Anglo-Saxon--, some "Frisian-English-Jutish-Scan danavian philology, Gaelic, and some others. Mehring, Engels' biographer, includes a friend's comment: "'Engels stutters in twenty languages.'"³⁵ Engels was a voracious reader of all literature, and J. B. S. Haldane, in his preface to Engels' Dialectics of Nature, observes that Engels "was probably the most widely educated man of his day."³⁶

³⁴ Franz Mehring, Karl Marx: The Story of His Life, With Illustrations and Facsimile Reproductions, Notes by the Author, an Appendix Prepared Under the Direction of Eduard Fuch Based On Researches of the Marx-Engels Institute, A Bibliography and an Index, trans. Edward Fitzgerald, ed. Ruth and Heinz Norden (New York: Covici, Friede, 1935), p. 116.

³⁵ Cited by Hyman, p. 182.

³⁶ J. B. S. Haldane, "Preface," to Frederick Engels, Dialectics of Nature, trans. and ed. Clemens Dutt (New York: International Publishers, 1940), p. xiv.

The letters Engels wrote, particularly those written after Marx's death, show an increasing rather than a decreasing interest in artistic problems.³⁷

And if this is true of Engels, it is even more so of Marx. From the beginning until the very end of his life, Marx retained his love for literature. The comments of Paul Lafargue, Marx's son-in-law, who knew Marx in the last years of his life are worth quoting at length:

He knew Heine and Goethe by heart, and would often quote them in conversation. He read the poets constantly, selecting authors from all the European languages. Year after year he would read Aeschylus again in the original Greek, regarding this author and Shakespeare as the two greatest dramatic geniuses the world has ever known. He made an exhaustive study of Shakespeare, for whom he had an unbounded admiration, and whose most insignificant characters, even, were familiar to him. There was a veritable Shakespeare cult in the Marx family, and the three daughters knew much of Shakespeare by heart. Shortly after 1848, when Marx wished to perfect his knowledge of English (which he could already read well), he sought out and classified all Shakespeare's characteristic expressions; and he did the same with some of the polemical writings of William Cobbett, for whom he had great esteem. Dante and Burns were among his favorite poets, and it was always a delight to him to hear his daughters recite Burns' satirical poems or sing Burns' love songs.

. . . Sometimes he would lie down on the sofa and read a novel; he often had two or three novels going at the same time, reading them by turns--
. . . He had a preference for eighteenth-century novels, and was especially fond of Fielding's Tom Jones. The modern novelists who pleased him best

³⁷ Five of these letters are of crucial importance in discussing Marxism's contribution to literary theory; they are the letters to Conrad Schmidt (5 August 1890 and 27 October 1890), to Paul Ernst (5 June 1890), to Joseph Bloch (21 September 1890), and to Hans Starhenburg (25 January 1894).

were Paul de Kock, Charles Lever, the elder Dumas and Sir Walter Scott, whose Old Mortality he considered a masterpiece. He had a predilection for tales of adventure and humorous stories. The greatest masters of romance were for him Cervantes and Balzac. Don Quixote was for him the epic of the decay of chivalry, whose virtues in the newly rising bourgeois world became absurdities and follies. His admiration for Balzac was so profound that he had planned to write a criticism of La Comedie Humaine as soon as he should have finished his economic studies. Marx looked upon Balzac, not merely as the historian of the social life of his time, but as a prophetic creator of character types which still existed only in embryo during the reign of Louis Philippe, and which reached full development under Napoleon III, after Balzac's death.

Marx could read all the leading European languages, and could write in three (German, French and English) . . . ; he was fond of saying, "A foreign language is a weapon in the struggle of life." . . . He was already fifty years old when he began to learn Russian. Although the dead and living languages already known to him had no close etymological relation to Russian, he had made such progress in six months as to be able to enjoy reading in the original the works of the Russian poets and authors whom he especially prized: Pushkin, Gogol and Shchedrin.³⁸

In contrast to Engels' experience, Marx's parents encouraged his interest in literature in the hope that it would later help him in whatever "practical" vocation he would choose. As a young man, Marx frequently visited the household of Ludwig von Westphalen, whose daughter, Jenny, was later to become Marx's wife. Ludwig von Westphalen (1770-1842), a prominent official in the

³⁸ Paul Lafargue, "Appendix: Marx and Literature," in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, Literature and Art: Selections From Their Writings (New York: International Publishers, 1947), pp. 138-39. Hereafter cited as Literature and Art. Lafargue's account is collaborated by Mehring, pp. 527-29.

Prussian administration of Trier, was devoted to literature, especially Homer and Shakespeare; "he, in turn, transmitted this admiration to young Marx, to whom he recited epic poetry and dramatic scenes in German, Greek, and English while on long walks."³⁹ By the time Marx left his home ostensibly to pursue a law career at the University of Bonn (October, 1835), he "took the writing of verse so seriously that . . . he aspired at least briefly to be a poet."⁴⁰

Most of the poems that have survived were written in the years 1836 and 1837 and are, for the most part, love lyrics written to Jenny, to whom he had secretly become engaged. Marx tried, fairly unsuccessfully, to have some of the poems published. Most scholars agree that they had little literary merit.⁴¹ In a letter to his father, Marx himself describes his poetry:

Onslaughts against the present, broad and shapeless expressions of unnatural feeling, constructed purely out of the blue, the complete opposition of what is and what ought to be, rhetorical reflections instead of poetic thoughts but perhaps also a certain warmth of sentiment and a struggle for

³⁹Demetz, p. 48.

⁴⁰Marcel Ollivier, "Karl Marx poète," Mercure de France, CCXLII (1933), 260-284, cited by William M. Johnston, "Karl Marx's Verse of 1836-1837 As a Foreshadowing of His Early Philosophy," JHI (April-June, 1967), p. 260.

⁴¹Demetz, pp. 50-59; Johnston, p. 60; Lifshitz, pp. 7-8.

movement characterizes all the poems in the first three volumes I sent to Jenny.⁴²

Marx burned many of his early poems, and all but two of the rest of them were thought to be lost until sixty of them were rediscovered and published in 1929.⁴³ Besides poetry, Marx tried his hand at writing a novel, which he entitled "Skorpion and Felix: A Humorous Novel" (1837). But as one critic puts it, "Since he has trying to imitate all the virtues of Sterne, Jean Paul, Hippel, and E. T. A. Hoffman in a single work, his effort necessarily remained without order, force, or effect."⁴⁴ Evidently Marx also realized that he was not destined to be a novelist, and he turned his attention to tragedy (again without success).

All in all, as with Engels, Marx's attempts at writing imaginative literature ended in failure. In a letter to his father (1837), Marx tells of a change in his life; henceforth, he is giving up poetry to study law. It is an important moment in his life; it is one of the "moments in life which mark the close of a period like boundary posts and at the same time definitely point to a new direction. . . . In such moments, however, the

⁴²Karl Marx, "Letter to His Father: On a Turning-Point in Life (1837)," Easton and Guddat, p. 42.

⁴³See Johnston, p. 259.

⁴⁴Demetz, p. 52.

individual becomes lyrical, for every transformation is to some extent a swan song, to some extent the overture to a great new poem, which strives to gain shape in tints still blurred but brilliant."⁴⁵ Even here, in his conscious rejection of the profession of letters, it is interesting to observe that Marx imagines a person's life as a "poem." Throughout the rest of his life, he never abandons the aesthetic metaphor.

Before dismissing Marx's literary efforts, some observations are necessary to indicate to what extent his early imaginative writings bear on his later work. To put it quite simply: Marx's consuming interest in the reading, writing, and criticizing of imaginative literature had a tremendous influence both on the form and content of his later writings (and the same can be said for Engels) and of his entire world view. Because Marx is seen either as an economist, a sociologist, a political scientist, a philosopher, or some combination of these, very little has been done until recently to assess the literary value and the influence of literary technique on his writings. As William Johnston observes, "Marx seems to many scholars the least poetic of philosophers."⁴⁶

⁴⁵Karl Marx, "Letter to His Father . . .," Easton and Guddat, pp. 40-41.

⁴⁶Johnston, p. 259.

Marx, however, was always concerned with the style of his writings. Professor Pamela Johnson, in her article, "The Literary Achievement of Marx,"⁴⁷ quotes Marx's defense of the style of Capital against the "mealy-mouthed babblers of German vulgar economy."⁴⁸ And in the "Preface to the Third German Edition" (1883) of Capital, Engels criticizes the style of some sections of the first German edition as being "more voracious, more of a single cast, but also more careless, studded with Anglicisms and in parts unclear."⁴⁹ He adds,

With regard to the style, Marx had himself thoroughly revised several subsections and thereby had indicated to me here, as well as in numerous oral suggestions, the length to which I could go in eliminating English technical terms and other Anglicisms. Marx would in any event have gone over the additions and supplemental texts and have replaced the smooth French with his own terse German; I had to be satisfied, when transferring them, with bringing them into maximum harmony with the original text.⁵⁰

Many years before he had written Capital, Marx summed up his thoughts on style: ". . . truth is universal. It does not belong to me, it belongs to all; it possesses

⁴⁷ Pamela Hansford Johnson, "The Literary Achievement of Marx," Modern Quarterly (Summer, 1947), pp. 239-44.

⁴⁸ Karl Marx, Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Vol. I, The Process of Capitalist Production, trans. from 3rd German edition Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling, ed. Frederick Engels (1887; rpt. New York: International Publishers, 1967), p. 16. Hereafter cited as Capital, I.

⁴⁹ Capital, I, p. 23.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 24.

me. I do not possess it. A style is my property, my spiritual individuality. Le style c'est l'homme. Indeed!"⁵¹

Professor Johnson, analyzing a number of Marx's works, reveals several literary techniques employed by Marx "to obtain the most forceful effects."⁵² The most "notable" stylistic traits are "the brief single statement in the form of a metaphor followed by a long and rolling sentence of qualification. Second, the use of bathos. . . ."⁵³ She also argues that the Bible, as well as the writings of Hegel and Carlyle, was a major source of Marx's style. Moreover, Professor William Johnston insists that there is "an obvious continuity between Marx's verse and his later work" part of which is seen in his style of writing: "His love of metaphor, his use of allusions, his construction of complex sentences all bear witness to his early exercise as a composer of verse."⁵⁴

⁵¹Karl Marx, "Comments on the Latest Prussian Censorship Instruction (1842)," Easton and Guddat, p. 71.

⁵²Johnson, p. 240.

⁵³Johnson, loc. cit.

⁵⁴Johnston, p. 260. Johnson refers to Edward Kölwel's, Von der Art zu Schreiben; Essays über philosophische und dichterische Ausdrucksmittel (Halle a.S., 1962), 130-159 for an analysis of the style of Das Kapital; Johnston notes that Kölwel concentrates on Marx's use of "chiasmus, puns, images, and allusions to classical antiquity in his prose." Johnston adds that Kölwel "does not mention the poems, where these same characteristics may be found in abundance" (p. 260).

To speak of Marx's aesthetic interests is not to refer only to an interest in metaphor or allusion but also to a consuming interest in the role of the artist and a contention that the artist in each man has a revolutionary potential. Therefore, there is not only a continuity of style, but the early verses foreshadow some of the major themes of Marx's later thought. In his satiric epigrams, which seem to be "in the tradition of Goethe's and Schiller's Xenien (1797),"⁵⁵ he voices his opposition to German idealism:

Kant and Fichte like to whirl in the ether,
 Searching for a distant land,
 While I only seek to understand completely
 What I found in the street.⁵⁶

Besides attacking German idealism and Hegelian abstractness, Marx also attacks German "philistinism," which "wants only to theorize about a political clash, in order to rationalize it out of existence":

In its arm-chair, cozy and stupid,
 The German public sits without speaking.
 When the storm roars above and around,
 When the sky clouds thick and dark,
 When lightning hisses and twists about,
 That does not stir the public in its senses.
 But when the sun comes forth,
 When the breezes whisper and the storm subsides,
 Then the public rises and lets out a cry,
 And writes a book, "The alarm is past."⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Demetz, p. 51.

⁵⁶ Johnston, p. 261. Johnston's translation.

⁵⁷ Ibid., pp. 264-65.

As I will argue in subsequent discussion, Marx's emphasis on theory and practice is central to his world view. In the above poem, Marx is referring to the political conflicts going on inside Germany ("the storm") and the "foundation of Marx's attack both on theorists and on philistines lies in his awareness of their political inertness. . . . Such a public would remain forever 'cozy and stupid.' It would be, in a word, bourgeois."⁵⁸

Lastly, in one of the few poems of Marx's to appear in print, Marx makes the link between the creative artist and the incipient revolutionist. In "The Minstrel" ("Der Spielmann"), there is a dialogue between a minstrel and an unknown questioner. When he is asked what he plays, the minstrel replies angrily:

What do I play, man! What do waves roar,
As they break in thunder on the rocks,
As the eye is blinded, as the bosom leaps,
As the soul sounds down toward hell!

His interrogator answers him:

Minstrel, you grind your heart with mockery,
And art, which a bright god gives you,
You shall carry and dazzle on waves of sound,
Until it swells up to the dance of the stars.

At which, the minstrel defiantly screams:

What's that? I'll thrust without missing
My sabre black with blood into your soul.
Get out of my house, get out of my sight;
Do you want children playing around your neck?

He who beats my time, who writes my piece,

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 265.

Must play the death march, louder and more
 furiously,
 Must play dark, must play light,
 Until heart breaks from bow and string.⁵⁹

Not only do we see the romantic artist in isolation--a common poetic theme of the times--but as Johnston points out, ". . . Marx has his artist threaten to kill the unappreciative listener. This artist carries a sabre, as well as a violin." He continues,

It is not far-fetched to say that out of this minstrel a revolutionary is waiting to be born. And even if we ignore Marx's post - 1846 vocation as a revolutionary, his portrait of the artist as the alienated individual par excellence suggests that his own sense of alienation may have deepened enormously during 1836 and 1837.⁶⁰

This image of man as both creator and rebel is extremely important in understanding Marx's thought. For Marx, both images came together in the figure of Prometheus.

M. H. Abrams, in his The Mirror and the Lamp, traces the figure of Prometheus in the works of Herder, Goethe--who "developed Prometheus into a symbol for the poet's painful but necessary isolation, in his creativity, from both men and gods"--, and August Wilhelm Schegel, in whose Berlin Lectures (1801-1803) "a number of these diverse developments from the analogy between the poet and

⁵⁹ Ibid., pp. 266-67.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 267.

the Creator were brought together."⁶¹ While at the university in Bonn, Marx attended two of Schegel's lecture courses, the one on Homer and the one on the Elegies of Propertius.⁶² It is difficult to ascertain how much influence Schegel's thought had on Marx, but Marx was certainly familiar with Goethe's work and Aeschylus was one of his favorite dramatists. One can see this Promethean element in his early poetry:

With disdain I will throw my gauntlet
Full in the face of the world,
And see the collapse of this pigmy giant
Whose fall will not stifle my ardour.
Then I will wander godlike and victorious
Through the ruins of the world
And, giving my words and active force,
I will feel equal to the creator.⁶³

In his introduction to his doctoral dissertation, "The Difference Between the Democritean and Epicurean Philosophy of Nature," Marx quotes Prometheus, "In plain words, I harbor a hate of all gods."⁶⁴ Evidently, Marx's identification with Prometheus was public knowledge; after the suppression of the Rheinische Zeitung (1843), which had been under Marx's editorship, a picture was published,

⁶¹M. H. Abrams, The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition (New York: W. W. Norton, 1953), p. 281.

⁶²Demetz, p. 50.

⁶³David McLellan, Marx Before Marxism (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), pp. 44-45.

⁶⁴Hammen, p. 25.

"a contemporary allegorical sketch . . . with Marx towering above everything, as an athletic, chained Prometheus, chained to an equally chained printing press, while the Prussian eagle pecks away at his liver, all on the banks of the Rhine with Cologne Cathedral silhouetted across the stream."⁶⁵ As I shall argue in subsequent discussions, this not only is Marx's picture of himself, but Prometheus is the archetype of Marx's "ideal" man.

Besides the stylistic continuity between Marx's early imaginative writing and interest in art and his later writing and the elaboration of common themes from his early writin, Marx's devotion to art and aesthetics has a much more profound significance. With all of his emphasis on economics--commodities, money, labor, production, wages, capital, etc.--Marx's models for thinking about society are essentially aesthetic. Moreover, since one's image of society determines how and what one can think about society, Marx's (and Engels') concern with art and aesthetics permeates his total world view; this concern imposes itself on his philosophy, his politics, his sociology, his economics, his conception of history, and on the very structure of the works themselves. His vision of man, society, and history is structured by aesthetic categories and artistic forms, predominantly those categories and forms taken from drama and dramatic criticism.

⁶⁵Hammen, loc. cit. The illustration (No. 12) is located between pages 174-75.

Even some of the most conservative Eastern European Marxists are beginning to investigate this aspect of Marxism. Professor Eduard Urbanek, Chairman of the Department of Sociology at Charles University, Prague, writes:

Does this mean, perhaps that Marx's conception of particular events as tragi-comedy or farce, or his idea of world as a stage are the substance of his entire conception of history and man? It would be, as I see it, a simplification to reduce Marx's complete materialist conception of history to this definite aspect of a potential conception of history of mankind. But it is indubitable that Marx really sees history up to a certain point in this way and--this arises out of his whole work--the idea of history as the stage is a component of his whole conception of history and man, whom he sees as the unconscious author of his own history. But the idea of world and history as a stage is only one part, a determinate part, of Marx's conception.⁶⁶

This dramatic view of history permeates all of Marx's writings. In 1843, in his "Toward the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law: Introduction," Marx compares the ancien regime of France with present day Germany:

The struggle against the German political present is the struggle against the past of modern nations, and they are still burdened with the reminders of that past. It is instructive for them to see the Ancien Regime, which lived through its tragedy with them, play its comedy as a German ghost. The history of the Ancien Regime was tragic so long as it was the established power in the world, while freedom on the other hand was a personal notion--in short, as long as it believed and had to believe

⁶⁶ Eduard Urbanek, "Roles, Masks and Characters: A Contribution to Marx's Idea of the Social Role," in Marxism and Sociology: Views From Eastern Europe, ed. Peter Berger (New York: Appleton, 1969), p. 193.

in its own validity. As long as the Ancien Regime as an existing world order struggled against a world that was just coming into being, there was on its side a historical but not a personal error. Its downfall was therefore tragic. . . . The modern Ancien Regime [i.e., the "present German regime"] is merely the comedian in a world whose real heroes are dead. History is thorough and goes through many phases as it conducts an old form to the grave. The final phase of a world historical form is comedy. The Greek gods, already tragically and mortally wounded in Aeschylus' Prometheus Bound, had to die again comically in Lucian's dialogues.⁶⁷

Further, Marx adds, "The relationship of the different spheres of German society is therefore not dramatic but epic. Each of them begins to be aware of itself and place itself beside the others, not as soon as it is oppressed but as soon as circumstances, without its initiative, create a social layer on which it can exert pressure in turn."⁶⁸

Approximately ten years later, Marx is still using aesthetic metaphors to describe the process of history. In The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte (1852), Marx opens his study with the following observation:

Hegel remarks somewhere that all facts and personages of great importance, in world history, occur, as it were, twice. He forgot to add: the first time as tragedy, the second as farce.⁶⁹

⁶⁷Karl Marx, "Toward the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law: Introduction," Easton and Guddat, pp. 253-54.

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 261.

⁶⁹Karl Marx, The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte, 2nd ed. (1852; rpt. New York: International Publishers, 1963), p. 15.

Marx goes on to discuss the way in which art was used by bourgeois society in the French Revolution:

But unheroic as bourgeois society is, it nevertheless took heroism, sacrifice, terror, civil war and battles of peoples to bring it into being. And in the classically austere traditions of the Roman republic its gladiators found the ideals and the art forms, the self-deceptions that they needed in order to conceal from themselves the bourgeois limitations of the content of their struggles and to keep their enthusiasm on the high plane of the great historical tragedy.⁷⁰

Note the images that Marx uses to describe Louis Bonaparte:

An old crafty roue, he conceives the historical life of the nations and their performance of state as comedy in the most vulgar sense, as a masquerade where the grand costumes, words and postures merely serve to mask the pettiest knavery. Thus on his expedition to Strasbourg, where a trained Swiss vulture had played the part of the Napoleonic eagle. For his irruption into Boulogne he puts some London lackeys into French uniforms. They represent the army. In his Society of December 10, he assembles ten thousand rascally fellows, who are to play the part of the people, as Nick Bottom that of the lion. At a moment when the bourgeoisie itself played the most complete comedy, but in the most serious manner in the world, without infringing any of the pedantic conditions of French dramatic etiquette, and was itself half deceived, half convinced of the solemnity of its own performance of state, the adventurer, who took the comedy as plain comedy, was bound to win. Only when he has eliminated his solemn opponent, when he himself now takes his imperial role seriously and under the Napoleonic mask imagines he is the real Napoleon, does he become the victim of his own conception of the world, the serious buffoon who no longer takes world history for a comedy, but his comedy for world history.⁷¹

⁷⁰ Ibid., pp. 16-17.

⁷¹ Ibid., pp. 75-76.

What about Capital? As one Marxist scholar puts it,

The book can also, though with difficulty, be read as a straight treatise of economics, and many have done so. It then appears an infinitely torturous, unsuccessful endeavor to demonstrate the a priori inevitability of a falling rate of profit and various consequences in the way of intensified exploitation of the labour force. But unless we grasp it as drama, and in fact as one of the most dramatic books of modern times, we shall comprehend neither the powerful influence that it has exerted upon history nor its basic underlying significance. It is, moreover, drama in the tragic mood, and it may be pertinent to add that its author was all his life a lover of Aeschylean and Shakespearean tragedy.⁷²

Even the doctrinaire Marxist-Leninist, Lifshitz, argues that,

. . . while working on Capital Marx was interested in categories and forms bordering on the aesthetic because of their analogy to the contradictory vicissitudes of the categories of capitalist economy. The connection between Marx's aesthetic and economic interests is apparent from those passages where he speaks of the "sublime"; he notes those things which indicate its quantitative character (in the sublime, too, "the qualitative becomes quantitative"): the tendency toward endless movement, the pursuit of the grandiose, the transcendence of all boundaries and all "measure" which is characteristic of capitalism.⁷³

There is more, however, than reasoning by analogy. In Capital, the world is the stage on which the alienated, exploited worker confronts his exploiter, the capitalist, with characters coming on and off stage, changing roles as the drama unfolds:

⁷²Tucker, Philosophy and Myth in Karl Marx, p. 204.

⁷³Lifshitz, The Philosophy of Art of Karl Marx, p. 76.

On leaving this sphere of simple circulation or of exchange of commodities, which furnishes the "Free-trader Vulgaris" with his views and ideas, and with the standard by which he judges a society based on capital and wages, we think we can perceive a change in the physiognomy of our dramatis personae. He, who before was the money-owner, now strides in front as capitalist: the possessor of labour-power follows as his labourer. The one with the air of importance, smirking, intent on business; the other, timid and holding back, like one who is bringing his own hide to market and has nothing to expect but--a hiding.⁷⁴

Wylie Sypher, who does not approve of Marx's approach, claims that in Capital "melodrama has been superimposed upon the historical process." He continues,

A deep paradox within Capital is caused by a transposition from philosophic to aesthetic structures. Philosophically the work is not melodrama; aesthetically it is. And the aesthetic transvaluation here proves of the greatest consequence: in spite of the discriminations of his essentially undramatic dialectic Marx has yielded to the almost irresistible aesthetic temptation to prefigure the revolution as drama. This aesthetic transvaluation from dialectic to theatre has unexpected ethical and economic results. The mentality of crisis has always been favorable to poetry and symbolic action. A great deal of 19th Century poetry was written in prose. The Victorian novel has recently been appraised as poetry--Wuthering Heights, for example. History by Carlyle is no less poetic, like the philosophy of Nietzsche. In this sense Capital is a dramatic poem, or possibly a dramatic epic.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Karl Marx, Capital, I, p. 176.

⁷⁵ Wylie Sypher, "Aesthetic of Revolution: The Marxist Melodrama," Kenyon Review, 10, No. 3 (Summer, 1948), 438, 400. Sypher's article is extremely valuable for the light it sheds on this aspect of Marx's thought. However, there seems to me to be at least two major problems with his argument. First, in criticizing Marx, he fails to demonstrate how another form would have provided better insights into the problems that Marx was examining. Second, it seems to me naive to suppose that the twentieth century is immune to seeing history and politics in

In addition, Harold Rosenberg argues that it is "this translation of the dramatic into the 'scientific'" which accounts for "the basic ambiguities of Marxist politics."⁷⁶ On the other hand, although paradox and ambiguity are the results of Marx's inconsistency, it may be that inconsistency is exactly the most appropriate approach. For Marx, men are actors, "dramatis personae" (e.g., Capital I, p. 148) on the world's stage, the "theatrum mundi."⁷⁷ The description of the scene (the non-human material world of events) can be described "scientifically" as a "calculus of events." Man's affairs, however, being dramatic, can be described as a "calculus of acts." As Kenneth Burke argues, "The ideal calculus of dramatic criticism would require, not an incongruity, but an inconsistency. I.e., it would be required to employ the coordinates of both

"melodramatic" terms. Syper writes: "We [i.e., those of us living in the twentieth century] cannot isolate events. Our interpretation is less personal. We are more scientific and sceptical" (p. 434). Are we? How do we explain what happened in Germany under Hitler and the extermination of six million Jews or Hiroshima? See Bill Kinser and Neil Kleinman, The Dream That Was No More A Dream: A Search For Aesthetic Reality in Germany 1890-1945 (Cambridge, Mass.: Schenkman, 1969), pp. 5-23; also Hugh Dalziel Duncan, Communication and Social Order (New York: Bedminster, 1962), pp. 225-249. If a dramatic model is not appropriate for understanding history, human relations, and politics, then what model is?

⁷⁶ Harold Rosenberg, Act and the Actor: Making the Self (New York: The World Publishing Company, 1970), p. 41.

⁷⁷ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, The German Ideology: Parts I and III, ed. with intro. R. Pascal (New York: International Publishers, 1947), p. 32.

determinism and free will."⁷⁸ The scientific approach (causal, deterministic, mechanistic) is not incompatible with a dramatic (reason, voluntarism, action) perspective; it has its function in describing the structure of the "ground" or "stage" upon which the drama takes place.

In considering Syper's and Rosenberg's points, it might be well to question whether it is possible (or desirable) to eliminate paradox and ambiguity from any world view that is as comprehensive as Marx's. This is certainly Stanley Edgar Hyman's point when he argues, in his The Tangled Bank, that "ultimately, the language of ideas is metaphor, and essentially metaphor. The arguments are not clothed in metaphor, they are metaphor. . . . But perhaps all science is ultimately metaphor, as Freud suggested in his open letter to Einstein, and even what we call comprehension and verification are only analogical processes. The ideas of Darwin, Marx, Frazer, and Freud are then as true as any ideas that explain our world to our satisfaction."⁷⁹

It is Hyman, more than any other commentator, who brilliantly demonstrates the profound effect Marx's (and Engels') involvement with literature and aesthetics had

⁷⁸ Kenneth Burke, The Philosophy of Literary Form: Studies In Symbolic Action, rev. ed. with notes by the author (New York: Vintage-Random House, 1957), p. 100.

⁷⁹ Hyman, The Tangled Bank, pp. 446-447.

on all of his work. He points out the "comic devices" and the puns in Marx's and Engels' first work written in collaboration---The Holy Family (1845)⁸⁰--and explains how the final chapter, "The Critical Last Judgment," is "a wild parody of the Book of Revelation."⁸¹ Furthermore, there is imaginative design in all of their work. The German Ideology (written in 1845-46)⁸² "opens . . . with a riot of metaphor";⁸³ The Poverty of Philosophy (written in French and published in Paris, 1847)⁸⁴ is written in "semi-dramatic form, not of theatre, but voiced perhaps in a lecture room or meeting hall."⁸⁵ Hyman argues that The Communist Manifesto (1848) is a "great masterpiece of rhetoric"⁸⁶ with a highly effective imaginative vision: "The key metaphor in the work is the one of

⁸⁰The Holy Family, or A Critique of Critical Criticism: Against Bruno Bauer and Company. The book was unavailable in English until 1956.

⁸¹Hyman, p. 90.

⁸²The German Ideology, A Criticism of Recent German Philosophy and Its Representatives Feuerbach, Bruno Bauer and Stirner, and a Criticism of German Socialism and Its Various Prophets. The book remained unpublished in their lifetime and was first published in full in 1932, in the edition of the Marx-Engels-Lenin Institute, in Moscow.

⁸³Hyman, p. 90.

⁸⁴Karl Marx, The Poverty of Philosophy: A Reply to the Philosophy of Poverty by M. Proudhon.

⁸⁵Hyman, p. 98.

⁸⁶Hyman, loc. cit.

stripping away veils that made its first appearance in The Poverty of Philosophy. The Manifesto's most powerful rhetorical passage is formally organized around that image":

The bourgeoisie, wherever it has got the upper hand, has put an end to all feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations. It has pitilessly torn asunder the motley feudal ties that bound man to his "natural superiors," and has left remaining no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest, than callous "cash payment." It has drowned the most heavenly ecstasies of religious fervor, of chivalrous enthusiasm, of philistine sentimentalism, in the icy water of egotistical calculation. It has resolved personal worth into exchange value, and in place of the numberless infeasible [sic.] chartered freedoms has set up that single, unconscionable freedom--Free Trade. In one word, for exploitation, veiled by religious and political illusions, it has substituted shameless, direct, brutal, naked exploitation.

The bourgeoisie has stripped of its halo every occupation hitherto honoured and looked up to with reverent awe. It has converted the physician, the lawyer, the priest, the poet, the man of science, into its paid wage-laborers.

The bourgeoisie has torn away from the family its sentimental veil, and has reduced the family relation to a mere money relation.⁸⁷

Hyman points out that Marx's The Class Struggles in France 1848-1850 (1850) focused not so much on "the permanent injustice of capitalism, but on the special and dramatic wickedness, luxuriance and immorality of the French ruling classes. . . . The thematic metaphor pervading . . .

⁸⁷ Birth of the Communist Manifesto, With Full Text of the Manifesto, All Prefaces by Marx and Engels, Early Drafts by Engels and Other Supplementary Material, ed., annotated, with intro. Dirk J. Struik (New York: International Publishers, 1971), pp. 91-92.

is that of a theatrical performance," and "what Marx finally identifies as his dramatic form is straight comedy. Events are a 'clumsily constructed comedy,' the speeches of Barrot are 'worthy of a Beaumarchais'. . . ." ⁸⁸
The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte (1852) is more explicit in its theatrical form" than The Class Struggles. ⁸⁹

As for Capital, Hyman insists its "basic form . . . is dramatic." It is full of heroes and villains, with the "true dramatic hero" as "the personified Proletariat," and the real villain "defined as 'capital personified and endowed with consciousness and will.' He is 'our friend Moneybags,' or 'his holiness, Free-trade,' or 'Rent-roll.' 'His soul is the soul of capital,' and his body is naturally 'the syphilitic and scrofulous' body of the upper classes." ⁹⁰

If Marx ever wrote a tragic drama, Hyman argues that it is his The Civil War in France (1871): "The revolting atrocities committed against the Commune, described by Marx in considerable detail, are proper sacrificial ritual, a 'tearing to pieces' of 'the living body of the proletariat.'" ⁹¹ However, the tone of the work is not the indignant rage of the Old Testament prophet,

⁸⁸ Hyman, p. 108.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 112.

⁹⁰ Ibid., pp. 138-41.

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 157.

"but the New Testament's glad tidings that salvation and redemption have come."⁹² In his last major work, Critique of the Gotha Program (1891)⁹³ Marx's "imaginative organization . . . is like the Revelation of St. John the Divine, giving the vision of apocalypse at the the second coming. Writing entirely in this spirit of personal testimony, Marx concludes the Critique, 'Dixi et salvavi animam meam.' 'I have spoken and saved my soul.'⁹⁴

Speaking of Engels, Hyman calls The Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844 (1845) a "neglected masterpiece," in which Engels anticipated Darwin's The Origin of the Species by fourteen years in describing the "social war, the war of each against all."⁹⁵ He describes Engels' Peasant War in Germany (1850) as primarily naturalistic in its emphasis on the details of the atrocities inflicted upon the peasants, and he compares Engels' Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Germany in 1848⁹⁶ to "a Grail Romance, with the impotent

⁹² Ibid., p. 157.

⁹³ This was a public letter, Marginal Notes to the Program of the German Workers Party, composed by Marx in 1875, and later published by Engels in 1891 as Critique of the Gotha Program.

⁹⁴ Hyman, p. 158.

⁹⁵ Ibid., pp. 163-64.

⁹⁶ The study appeared as a series of articles in the New York Tribune in 1851 and 1852 under Marx's name.

old Fisher King [Frederick William IV, King of Prussia] awaiting the stroke of the lance."⁹⁷ Hyman notes in Engels' Anti-Duehring (1877-1878)⁹⁸ something which Marx and Engels were both experts at--"polemical abuse."⁹⁹ In Engels' last major work (aside from Dialectics of Nature, written from 1872 to 1883), The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State (1884)¹⁰⁰ Hyman finds a study which "is far more than the execution of Marx's bequest. Actually it is the capping of Marx's great imaginative vision of the human condition with an adequate origin myth":

What Morgan offered, in fact, was myth of prehistoric original sin or primal crime . . . the theft of rights from the ancient mother.

In Capital, Marx had put the crime back into earlier history: capital was stolen from the working class in primitive accumulation. . . . Engels showed that that theft was merely the ritual repetition of the great primal theft. It is a true myth of the fall out of Eden, what Engels calls "a fall from the simple moral greatness of the old gentile society." The supremacy of women "was general in primitive times," . . . The patriarchal or patrilineal revolution was thus the primal crime: "The overthrow of mother-right was the world historical defeat of the female sex. With [patriliney] came all the evils of the fallen condition, the monogamous family and private property."¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ Hyman, p. 172.

⁹⁸ Frederick Engels, Herr Eugen Duehring's Revolution in Science.

⁹⁹ Hyman, p. 176.

¹⁰⁰ Frederick Engels, The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State, in the Light of the Researches of Lewis H. Morgan.

¹⁰¹ Hyman, p. 179.

Puns, parody, metaphor, satire, irony, drama, comedy, tragedy, epic Grail romance, ritual, myth: the ways in which they see the world and the ways in which this vision is structured in their works point to a perspective on Marx and Engels that has until recently been almost totally neglected.

Toward a General Theory of Creative Activity

The emphasis on Marx's and Engels' early interest in art and the way in which their interests in aesthetics permeated their later work were discussed for several reasons. One was to counteract the popular myth that Marx and Engels were concerned solely with economics and revolution. Another and more important justification for emphasizing what appears to be peripheral is to establish just how important aesthetic concerns were to both thinkers. For Marx and Engels, art is not epiphenomenal; its terms and its categories structure and determine the way in which they view the world. They have a dramatic vision. Just as Darwin, Frazer, and Freud had done, Marx produced a vision of the world that was in every sense dramatic. A third reason is to demonstrate that a discussion of Marxian aesthetics cannot be separated from Marxism as a total vision of the world. Indeed, it is the dialectical interaction between the aesthetic and the other elements of Marxism that constitute that vision. The last two reasons, moreover, will serve to justify the

procedure in the next section of this study, which attempts to discuss aesthetics, literature, and criticism from the point of view of this dramatic vision. My analysis of Marx's contribution to the study of literature and the methods of literary criticism will focus on the category of action: the act of writing, the work of art as a symbolic act, the act of experiencing literature, and the act of criticism. As we will see, the concept of action is the central metaphor of Marxism.

In order to develop a Marxist aesthetics, it is necessary to do more than simply string together a series of quotations which are then connected with a type of scholastic logic into a formal system; this method, it seems to me, is contrary to the whole spirit of Marxism. Instead, if one conceives of writing, creative activity, literature, reading, and criticism as acts and analyzes them as such, he will be much closer to the essential thrust of Marxist aesthetics. As one French Marxist says,

In other words, Marxism is not a philosophy of being, that is a philosophy like that of the Scholastic Theologians or the mechanist materialists, in which consciousness is at the most an image, and always (in Plato no less than in Epicurus) an impoverished image. . . . Marxism is a philosophy of act, that is, one which makes of consciousness and the human practice which engenders it and constantly enriches it a true reality, rooted in earlier activity and the real, and reflecting them, but constantly going beyond the given and continually adding to reality by a creative act, which is not

yet given at the level of pre-human nature and the success of which nothing can guarantee in advance.¹⁰²

Instead of treating creative activity, works of literature, and criticism as "things," they will be treated as "events" or "acts." The literature itself will be treated as a symbolic act; it will be analyzed not as an object but as a "work." As Richard E. Palmer, in his Hermeneutics, argues "A 'work' is always stamped with the human touch; the world itself suggests this, for a work is always a work of man (or of God). An 'object,' on the other hand, can be a work or it can be a natural object. To use the word 'object' in reference to a work blurs an important distinction, for one needs to see the work not as object but as work."¹⁰³

The four activities that are of prime concern for Marxism are: (1) the elements of the creative act and its function; (2) the work itself (conceived of as a symbolic act) and its function; (3) the nature of the audience and its function; and (4) the act of criticism and its function.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Garaudy, Marxism in the Twentieth Century, p. 84.

¹⁰³ Palmer, Hermeneutics, p. 7.

¹⁰⁴ Since my approach to Marxism and its contribution to the study of literature and literary criticism is somewhat unique, the reader may wish to consult other studies. Besides the works which have already been cited and which will be drawn upon for this particular study, there remains a vast amount of material on Marxism. The

The Agent and the Creative Act

Contrasting their method with the methods of German idealism, Marx and Engels write in *The German Ideology*, ". . . we do not set out from what men say, imagine, conceive, nor from men as narrated, thought of, imagined, conceived, in order to arrive at men in the flesh. We set out from real, active men, and on the basis of their real life-process we demonstrate the development of the ideological reflexes and echoes of this life process."¹⁰⁵ It is this emphasis on human activity which is at the core of Marxism. Gajo Petrovic, a Yugoslav philosopher, argues, "Man for Marx is the being of 'praxis.'" And what is praxis? "I think that such is the interpretation of praxis as a universal-creative self creative activity, activity by which man transforms and creates his world and himself. Exactly such an interpretation prevails in Karl Marx."¹⁰⁶

Furthermore, Marx is not speaking of mere mechanical action. Although he writes, "It is not the

two most useful bibliographies on Marxism and its relationship to art and aesthetics are: Lee Baxandall, Marxism and Aesthetics: A Selective Annotated Bibliography, Books and Articles in the English Language (New York: Humanities Press, 1968), and John Lachs, Marxist Philosophy: A Bibliographical Guide (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1967). For current studies appearing in English, see the bi-monthly American Institute for Marxist Studies Newsletter (1964--).

¹⁰⁵ The German Ideology, I & III, p. 14.

¹⁰⁶ Petrovic, Marx in the Mid-Twentieth Century, pp. 78-79.

consciousness of men that determines their existence, but, on the contrary, their social existence determines their consciousness,"¹⁰⁷ he is not suggesting that consciousness is unimportant; on the contrary:

Only when the core of existence stands revealed as a social process can existence be seen as the product, albeit the hitherto unconscious product, of human activity. . . . Marx urged us to understand 'the sensuous world,' the object, reality, as human sensuous activity. This means that man must become conscious of himself as a social being, as simultaneously the subject and object of the socio-historical process."¹⁰⁸

As Richard Bernstein argues, "Consciousness is not something other than 'sensuous human activity' or praxis. It is to be understood as an aspect or moment of praxis itself."¹⁰⁹

The paradigmatic form of conscious activity for man is production, labor; Marx and Engels write,

Men can be distinguished from animals by consciousness, by religion or anything else you like.

¹⁰⁷ Karl Marx, Critique of Political Economy (1859) in Howard Selsam and Harry Martel, ed., Reader in Marxist Philosophy: From the Writings of Marx, Engels, and Lenin (New York: International Publishers, 1963), p. 186.

¹⁰⁸ Georg Lukacs, History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: Merlin Press, 1971), pp. 18-19. Included in Lukacs' essay "What Is Orthodox Marxism," first published in 1919.

¹⁰⁹ Richard J. Bernstein, Praxis and Action: Contemporary Philosophies of Human Activity (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971), p. 43. Bernstein's study is significant in that it shows that praxis, the concept of man as agent is the "focal point" on which Marxism, existentialism, pragmatism, and analytic philosophy converge.

They themselves begin to distinguish themselves from animals as soon as they begin to produce their means of subsistence, a step which is conditioned by their physical organization. By producing their means of subsistence men are indirectly producing their actual material life.

The way in which men produce their means of subsistence depends first of all on the nature of the actual means they find in existence and have to reproduce. This mode of production must not be considered simply as being the reproduction of the physical existence of the individuals. Rather it is a definite form of activity of these individuals, a definite form of expressing their life, a definite mode of life on their part. As individuals express their life, so they are.¹¹⁰

Labor, for Marx, is a dramatic event, born out of the struggle between man and his environment. Marx, moreover, always distinguished human labor from animal labor:

We presuppose labour in a form that stamps it as exclusively human. A spider conducts operations that resemble those of a weaver, and a bee puts to shame many an architect in the construction of her cells. But what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is this, that the architect raises his structure in imagination before he erects it in reality. At the end of every labour-process, we get a result that already existed in the imagination of the labourer at its commencement. He not only effects a change of form in the material on which he works, but he also realizes a purpose of his own that gives the law to his modus operandi, and which he must subordinate his will.¹¹¹

Then, for Marx, it is man's exercise of his imagination that gives labor its specific form. All human labor, in its unalienated form, is creative. All men have the potential to create works of art. Again Marx makes the distinction between animal production and human production:

¹¹⁰The German Ideology, I & III, p. 7.

¹¹¹Capital, I, p. 78. Italics mine.

Of course, animals also produce. They construct nests, dwellings, as in the case of bees, beavers, ants, etc. But they only produce what is strictly necessary for themselves or their young. They produce only in a single direction, while man produces universally. They produce only under the compulsion of direct physical needs, while man produces in freedom from such need. Animals only produce themselves, while reproduces the whole of nature. The products of animal production belong directly to their physical bodies, while man is free in face of his product. Animals construct only in accordance with the standards and needs of the species to which they belong, while man knows how to produce in accordance with the standards of every species and knows how to apply the appropriate standard to the object. Thus man constructs also in accordance with the laws of beauty.¹¹²

As one French Marxist puts it, "Marx's materialist position is accordingly perfectly clear: labour is the creative act which creates not nature, but man and his history in his encounter with nature. . . . It is from the creative act of man . . . that Marxism starts."¹¹³

¹¹² Karl Marx, Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts (1844) in Karl Marx: Early Writings, trans. and ed. T. B. Bottomore, Foreword by Erich Fromm (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), p. 128. Hereafter cited as Early Writings. Italics mine.

¹¹³ Garaudy, Marxism in the Twentieth Century, pp. 124, 164. In discussing Marx's concept of praxis, Lefebvre makes the important point distinction: We must distinguish between activities concerned with physical nature and activities with human beings. The latter arise out of the division of labor, and yet the term "labor" does not quite apply to them. We speak of religious, political, and cultural functions rather than of religious, political, or cultural work. Let us designate the two groups of activities by the terms poiesis and praxis, respectively. Poiesis gives human form to the sensuous; it includes man's relations with nature--his labors as a farmer, craftsman, and artist--and more generally, the appropriation of nature by human beings, both of the nature external to themselves and that

To be free to construct in accordance with the laws of beauty is, for Marx, an ideal for man, a goal to strive after, but an ideal as yet unrealized. Failure to achieve this goal results in alienation and man's conflict with his world.

Marx's conception of man as a creative producer who in the creative activity of production changes nature and himself is not an idea that Marx originated. This conception of man is central to the whole German romantic tradition. The idea finds echoes in Kant, Fichte, Shelling, A. W. Schegel, and Hegel. As Robert Tucker argues, from Kant onward, "man's self-realization as a godlike being became the theme of a philosophy of history."¹¹⁴ By the same token, Marx made no attempt to deny Hegel's influence on his and Engels' thinking (both belonged to the Young Hegelians), and Tucker explains that it was this particular concept that so fascinated Marx: "What made Hegelianism irresistibly compelling to young Marx was the theme of man's soaring into the unlimited. . . . The

which is internal to themselves. Praxis comprises interhuman relationships, managerial activities, and the functions of the state as they come into being. In a broad sense, praxis subsumes poiesis; in the strict sense, it only designates the pragmata, the matters actually deliberated by the members of society. [Henri Lefebvre, The Sociology of Marx (New York: Random House, 1968), pp. 44-45.]

¹¹⁴Tucker, Philosophy and Myth in Karl Marx, pp. 38-39.

electrifying message that he found in Hegel was the idea that man is God. Hegelianism was the 'philosophy' whose very own confession was that of Prometheus. Its epochal significance lay in the revelation of 'human self-conscious' as the supreme divinity by the side of which none other should be held."¹¹⁵ But whereas the goal of history for Hegel is the self-realization of God (an aspect of Spirit or Geist) in man, for Marx (following Feuerbach) history is simply man's creative activity directed toward the ultimate realization of man qua man devoid of religious fantasies. M. H. Abrams compares Marx's vision with that of Carlyle and adds that,

. . . in his Manuscripts [of 1844] Marx's outlook on man and on history is primarily moral, not economic, and his ideal for mankind embodies the essential values of Romantic humanism. The movement of history is toward realizing the highest good of the individual man, and that good Marx defines, very much as Schiller had defined it, as the creative self-realization of the "whole man," who by "the complete emancipation of all the human qualities and sense" has achieved "all the plentitude of his being" and lives as an integral part of a community in which love, replacing acquisitive "egotism" and purely monetary bonds between individuals, has become the natural form of relationship.¹¹⁶

The major difference between Kant, who seemed to divorce art and aesthetic experience from sensation,

¹¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 74, 75.

¹¹⁶ M. H. Abrams, Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Poetry (New York: W. W. Norton, 1971), p. 314.

emotion, purpose, and the socio-ethical problems of life, and Hegel, who saw art as a manifestation of the Absolute, separating form and content"¹¹⁷ and Marx, is that Marx located the aesthetic nature of man in the labor process itself as a manifestation of man's essence. Ideally, in his actual production of material life, in his work, man, using his imagination and creating according to the "laws of beauty" creates works of art. It is this conception of man's nature that brings one critic to the conclusion: "Few writers have gone farther than Marx in characterizing the essence of humanity in artistic terms."¹¹⁸ As this study will show, it is primarily this aspect of Marxism--man as worker and creator and labor as an aesthetic process--that was emphasized by William Morris.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷ Israel Knox, The Aesthetic Theories of Kant, Hegel, and Schopenhauer (New York: Columbia University Press, 1936), p. 83.

¹¹⁸ Melvin Rader, "Marx's Interpretation of Art and Aesthetic Value," British Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, 7, No. 3 (July, 1967), 239.

¹¹⁹ This conceptual linkage between work and art has a curious history in the late nineteenth century. The concept of work as a method of salvation--the Victorian gospel--became a cornerstone of Victorian culture (see Walter E. Houghton, The Victorian Frame of Mind, 1830-1870 [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957], pp. 242-262). Moreover, Max Weber in his Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism has shown how the work ethic, particularly as it is manifested in the religious sense of a "mission" or "calling" was very conducive to the growth and ethics of capitalism. Both Carlyle and Ruskin tended to link the concepts of work and artistic activity. One of the results of this merging was the increasing awareness of the obvious contradictions between work and artistic endeavor as they existed at the time--the dehumanizing

It is the creative act with which Marxism commences, and, says Roger Garaudy, "It is there too that it ends up; making of each man a man, that is a creator, a 'poet.'¹²⁰ For Marx and Engels, there is nothing special or mysterious in essence (ontologically speaking) about an artist. Although all men cannot produce great works of art, all men have the potentiality for creative activity:

The exclusive concentration of artistic talent in a few individuals and its consequent suppression in the large masses is the result of the division of labor. Even if under certain social conditions everyone were an excellent painter, this would not prevent everyone from also being an original painter, so that here too the difference between "human" and "individual" work becomes sheer nonsense. The subordination of the individual to a given art so that he is exclusively a painter, a sculptor, etc., and the very name sufficiently expresses the narrowness of his professional development and his division of labor--in a communist organization of society all this disappears. In a communist organization of

conditions of labor, the mechanization of labor, the meaninglessness of work, and the ugliness of its products--which became a major element in almost all social criticism of Victorian culture. Curiously, the Aesthetic movement, with its "art for art's sake" slogan--in part a protest against the prevailing culture--still tended to merge the categories of artistic activity and work. This was continued in the pronouncements of the Symbolists, those in England and on the continent. There was an emphasis on the writer as "craftsman," the poet was a "sculpture" whose work was fashioned and admired as if it were a Ming vase. In France, from about 1850 onwards, labor became a criteria of value on par with genius. With Flaubert, Gautier, and Baudelaire, there is an emphasis on "highly wrought form," with the implication that value may be measured in the amount of labor expended in the work (see Roland Barthes, Writing Degree Zero and Elements of Semiology [Boston: Beacon Press, 1970], pp. 62-73).

¹²⁰Garaudy, Marxism in the Twentieth Century, p. 164.

society there are no painters; at most there are people who, among other things, also paint.¹²¹

Ideally, all men are capable of artistic and critical activity; it is the division of labor in society that creates distinctions between physical and intellectual activity, between mechanical and creative acts. There is nothing inherent in man's nature that determines this division. This division, however, has been one of the chief elements in historical development up to the present. Marx assesses the consequences:

For as soon as labour is distributed, each man has a particular, exclusive sphere of activity, which is forced upon him and from which he cannot escape. He is a hunter, a fisherman, a shepherd, or a critical critic, and must remain so if he does not want to lose his means of livelihood; while in communist society, where nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes, society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing to-day and another to-morrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming a hunter, fisherman, shepherd or critic.¹²²

Marx sees man's drive to overcome fragmentation as one of the motive forces in history.

Before proceeding to discuss the nature of the creative act itself, it is necessary to make one point clear; when Marx speaks of "man" and "action," he is not

¹²¹ Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, The German Ideology in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, Literature and Art, p. 76.

¹²² The German Ideology, p. 22.

speaking of the isolated man or of an activity divorced from social relationships. On the contrary, man becomes conscious of himself only in relationships with others. Subjectivity is born in language and communication, and language is a social product:¹²³ "language, like consciousness, only arises from the need, the necessity, of intercourse with other men. . . . Consciousness is therefore from the very beginning a social product, and remains as long as men exist at all."¹²⁴ By the same token, at no moment is man's activity solely individual, either in its structure or its function. This is partly the result of the self arising and continuing to exist in and through communication with other, and partly the result of action having a symbolic phase (in language, images, etc.), the symbols of which are social in origin and meaning. As Marx explains,

Social activity and social mind by no means exist only in the form of activity or mind which is manifestly social. Nevertheless social activity and mind, that is, activity and mind which show themselves directly in a real association with other men, are realized everywhere where this direct expression of sociability is based on the nature of the activity or corresponds to the nature of the mind.

Even when I carry out scientific work, etc., an activity which I can seldom conduct in direct association with other men--I perform a social because human act. It is not only the material of my activity--like the language itself which the thinker uses--which is given to me as a social product. My

¹²³ See Capital, I, p. 74.

¹²⁴ German Ideology, p. 19.

own existence is a social activity. For this reason, what I myself produce, I produce for society and with the consciousness of acting as a social being.

. . . It is above all necessary to avoid postulating "society" once more as an abstraction confronting the individual. The individual is a social being. The manifestation of his life--even when it does not appear directly in the form of a social manifestation, accomplished in association with other men,--is therefore a manifestation and affirmation of social life. Individual human life and species-life ["species-life" was used by Feuerbach and Marx to signify man's awareness of his universal human qualities, of belonging to the human species] are not different things even though the mode of existence of individual life is necessarily a more particular or more general mode of individual life. In his species-consciousness man confirms this real social life, and reproduces his real existence in thought, while conversely species-being confirms itself in species-consciousness, and exists for itself in its universality as a thinking being. Though man is a unique individual--and it is just his particularity which makes him an individual, a really individual social being--he is equally the whole, the real whole, the subjective existence of society as thought and experienced. He exists, in reality, as the representation and the real mind of social existence, and as the sum of human manifestation of life.

Thought and being are indeed distinct, but they also form a unity.¹²⁵

As this study will emphasize in its final section, it is here, as well as in a number of other concepts that Marxism converges with a number of other social philosophies, especially those which were stimulated by the pragmatic tradition in American philosophy. As

¹²⁵ Karl Marx, Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts (1844) in Karl Marx: Selected Writings in Sociology and Social Philosophy, trans. T. B. Bottomore, ed. intro. and notes T. B. Bottomore and Maximilien Rubel, Foreword by Erich Fromm (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1956), pp. 76-78. Hereafter cited as Selected Writings in Sociology.

George Herbert Mead explains,

Our symbols are all universal. You cannot say anything that is absolutely particular; anything you say that has any meaning at all is universal. You are saying something that calls out a specific response in anybody else provided that the symbol exists for him in his experience as it does for you. . . . Thinking always implies a symbol which will call out the same response in another that it calls out in the thinker. Such a symbol is a universal of discourse; it is universal in its character. We always assume that the symbol we use is one which will call out in the other person the same response, provided it is part of his mechanism of conduct. A person who is saying something is saying to himself what he says to others; otherwise he does not know what he is talking about.¹²⁶

Given, then, Marx's conception of man as a creature of praxis (social action) who in creative activity changes nature and himself, what can be said about

¹²⁶ George Herbert Mead, Mind, Self, and Society: From the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist, ed. and intro. Charles W. Morris (1934; rpts. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), pp. 146-147. Mead also explains why art must be social art:

It is the task not only of the actor [i.e., agent, man, etc.] but of the artist as well to find the sort of expression that will arouse in others what is going on in himself. The lyric poet has an experience of beauty with an emotional thrill to it, and as an artist using words he is seeking for those words which will answer to his emotional attitude, and which will call out in others the attitude he himself has. He can only test his results in himself by seeing whether these words do call out in him the response he wants to call out in others. (pp. 146-47)

See also George Herbert Mead, The Philosophy of the Act, ed. and intro. Charles W. Morris (1938; rpt. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967); Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1968); Herbert Blumer, Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1969); Hugh Dalziel Duncan, Communication and Social Order.

artistic activity, and, specifically, literary activity? Artistic and literary activity are, as one Marxist puts it, "a phase of labour," because "what characterizes specifically human labour is the emergence of the project, the creation of a model, which becomes the law of action."¹²⁷ This is what Marx means when he describes the architect who "raises his structure in imagination before he erects it in reality."¹²⁸ That is to say, art originates in the symbolic phase of action; this symbolic phase becomes public when it is "expressed" in some medium. It is human existence, human action made manifest in symbolic forms. Although Marx never formulated a definition of art or literature, I think he would not object to this one: "Great literature is the conscious exploration through the imagination of the possibilities of human action in society."¹²⁹ The emphasis on "objectification" is important, not only, as we shall see, because it is involved with Marx's conception of alienation but also because, in this way, understanding and interpretation and criticism can be focused on a fixed,

¹²⁷ Garaudy, pp. 165, 169.

¹²⁸ Capital, I, p. 178.

¹²⁹ Hugh Dalziel Duncan, Language and Literature in Society: A Sociological Essay on Theory and Method in the Interpretation of Linguistic Symbols with a Bibliographical Guide to the Sociology of Literature (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), p. 3.

"objective" expression of experience, assisting the individual's attempts to comprehend it through introspection. Literature is "objective" in that the writer (just as any man) must use language, which is a social product, and, hence, he must make use of a set of "consensually validated symbols."¹³⁰ An animal, Marx writes, "is one with life activity. It does not distinguish the activity from itself. It is its activity, but man makes his life activity itself an object of his will and consciousness."¹³¹ Through language, man objectifies his consciousness (his reason, will, desire, imagination) into specific symbolic structures, some of which are designated literature and these structures are as much a product of his activity as any material substance. Thus nature, events, situations, actions acquire "specific 'meanings' in relation to the over-all 'meaning' of social life and the course it follows."¹³² Literature, then, is a verbal parallel to a pattern of experience; it is the objectification of the dramatic rehearsal in the imagination of the possibilities of human action. Thus, Ernst Bloch, the eminent Marxist philosopher, writes: "Art is at one and the same

¹³⁰ Cf. Duncan, Language and Literature in Society, pp. 9-13.

¹³¹ Karl Marx, Early Writings, p. 127 (second italics are mine).

¹³² Lefabvre, p. 81. Of course, the over-all "meaning" must also be expressed in symbolic structures.

time a laboratory and a carnival of possibilities brought to fulfillment."¹³³

Marx is not joking when he says, "A style is my property, my spiritual individuality. Le style, c'est l'homme. Indeed!"¹³⁴ Under "ideal" conditions, Marx says,

Our productions would be so many mirrors reflecting our nature. Suppose we had produced things as human beings: in his production each of us would have twice affirmed himself and the other. (1) In my production I would have objectified my individuality and its particularity, and, in the course of the activity I would have enjoyed an individual life; in viewing the object I would have experienced the individual joy of knowing my personality as an objective, sensuously perceptible, and indubitable power. (2) In your satisfaction and your use of my product, I would have had the direct and conscious satisfaction that my work satisfied a human need, that it objectified human nature, and that it created an object appropriate to the need of another human being. (3) I would have been the mediator between you and the species and you would have experienced me as a redintegration [sic.] of your own nature and a necessary part of your self; I would have been affirmed in your thought as well as your love. (4) In my individual life I would have directly created your life; in my individual activity

¹³³ Cited in Frederic Jameson, Marxism and Form: Twentieth Century Dialectical Theories of Literature (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1971), p. 150. This is not so different from Aristotle's distinction between poetry and history: "It is not the function of the poet to relate what has happened, but what may happen,--what is possible according to the law of probability or necessity" (S. H. Butcher, Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art: With A Critical Text and Translation of the Poetics, 4th ed. [n.p.: Dover, 1951], p. 35).

¹³⁴ Karl Marx, "Comments on the Latest Prussian Censorship Instruction," Easton and Guddat, p. 71.

I would have immediately confirmed and realized my true human and social nature.¹³⁵

In this important passage, not only does one find--however general--Marx's criteria of value, but one sees, at least implicitly, the concept of art as a "mediator" between man, nature, and other men. This will be discussed in the section of the function of literature. It is sufficient to note here, how close Marx is to other Romantics. M. H. Abrams quotes Coleridge: "Art, said Coleridge, is 'the mediatrix between, and reconciler of, nature and man. . . . [It is] the union and reconciliation of that which is nature with that which is exclusively human.'" Abrams goes on to add,

The difference is that the reconciling and integrative role which, in their various ways, Schiller, Schelling, Hegel, Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Blake had assigned to the imaginative work of the artist, Marx expands to include all the work of men's hands--provided, that is, that this work is performed in the social ambiance of free communal enterprise.¹³⁶

For Marx, even if the "communal enterprise" once existed, it cannot exist under capitalism; it can only reappear if capitalism is overthrown.

Society and the Creative Act

Probably the most important element in Marxist literary criticism is derived from Marx's and Engels' remarks on the relationship between the modes of labor

¹³⁵ Karl Marx, "Feuerbachian Criticism of Hegel," Easton and Guddat, p. 281.

¹³⁶ M. H. Abrams, Natural Supernaturalism, p. 316.

the social existence engendered by these modes, and the consciousness of men as manifest in their culture, the relation between the material "base" and the ideological "superstructure." This relationship is most clearly spelled out in two works, The German Ideology and Marx's Critique of Political Economy (1859). In The German Ideology, Marx and Engels write,

The production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness, is at first directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of men, the language of real life. Conceiving, thinking, the mental intercourse of men, appear at this stage [feudalism] as the direct efflux of their material behavior. The same applies to mental production as expressed in the language of the politics, laws, morality, religion, metaphysics of a people. . . . we do not set out from what men say, imagine, conceive, nor from men as narrated, thought of, imagined, conceived, in order to arrive at men in the flesh. We set out from real, active men, and on the basis of their life-process we demonstrate the development of the ideological reflexes and echoes of this life process. The phantoms formed in the human brain are also, necessarily, sublimates of their material life-process, which is empirically verifiable and bound to material premises. Morality, religion, metaphysics, all the rest of ideology and their corresponding forms of consciousness, thus no longer retain the semblance of independence. They have no history, no development; but men, developing their material production and their material intercourse, alter, along with this their real existence, their thinking and the products of their thinking. Life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life.¹³⁷

Approximately thirteen years later, Marx writes,

In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are

¹³⁷ The German Ideology, pp. 13-15.

independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness. At a certain stage of development, the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing relations within the framework of which they have operated hitherto. From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an era of social revolution. The changes in the economic foundations lead sooner or later to the transformations of the whole immense superstructure. In studying such transformations it is always necessary to distinguish between the material transformation of the economic conditions of production, which can be determined with the precision of natural science, and the legal, political, religious, artistic, or philosophic--in short, ideological forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out. Just as one does not judge an individual by what he thinks about himself, so one cannot judge such a period of transformation by its consciousness, but on the contrary, this consciousness must be explained from the contradictions of material life, from the conflict existing between the social forces of production and the relations of production.¹³⁸

The basic thrust of the argument is relatively simple; as Engels explains, what Marx "discovered" is,

. . . the simple fact, hitherto concealed by an overgrowth of ideology, that mankind must first of all eat and drink, have shelter and clothing, before it can pursue politics, science, religion,

¹³⁸ Karl A. Marx, A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, ed. and intro. Maurice Dobb (New York: International Publishers, 1970), pp. 20-21.

art, etc., and that therefore the production of the immediate material means of subsistence and consequently the degree of economic development attained by a given people or during a given epoch, form the foundation upon which the state institutions, the legal conceptions, the art and even religious ideas of the people concerned have been evolved, and in the light of which these things must be explained, instead of vice versa as had hitherto been the case.¹³⁹

Within specific historical modes of material production, specific, historical social relations arise, and in conformity with their social relationships, men create "principles, ideas and categories" to encompass those relationships. "Thus," says Marx, "these ideas, these categories, are as little eternal as the relations they express. They are historical and transitory products."¹⁴⁰

Does this mean, as some of Marx's interpreters have indicated, that the relationship between the base and the superstructure is an absolutely determined, unidirectional relationship, with the base, the mode of production, dominating everything? Obviously not. In the first place, this simplistic view would make nonsense of Marx's concern with consciousness and the role of ideology in history. If the mode of material production determines all, what role does man's consciousness play?

¹³⁹ Frederick Engels, "Speech at the Graveside of Karl Marx (1883)," in Reader in Marxist Philosophy, pp. 188-89.

¹⁴⁰ Karl Marx, The Poverty of Philosophy in Reader in Marxist Philosophy, p. 188.

More importantly, this interpretation completely ignores Marx's dialectical method, which rejects the existence of any purely one-sided cause-and-effect relationships; it recognizes in the simplest facts a complicated interaction of causes and effects. There is no simple causal relationship between the mode of production, the social relationships, and the ideological superstructure. In the same work where he posits the existence of the base and the corresponding superstructure, Marx writes,

As regards art, it is well known that some of its peaks by no means correspond to the general development of society; nor do they therefore to the material substructure, the skeleton as it were of its organisation. For example the Greeks compared with modern [nations], or else Shakespeare. . . . The difficulty we are confronted with is not, however, that of understanding how Greek art and epic poetry are associated with certain forms of social development. The difficulty is that they still give us aesthetic pleasure and are in certain respects regarded as a standard and unattainable ideal.¹⁴¹

After Marx's death and with the beginning of a long line of interpretations of his work, Engels went to great lengths to disassociate Marx's ideas from any dogmatic assertion of economic determinism. In a letter written in 1890, Engels insists,

that while the material mode of existence is the primum agens, this does not preclude the ideological spheres from reacting upon it in their turn, though with a secondary effect,. . . . In general the word "materialistic" serves many of the

¹⁴¹Karl Marx, Critique of Political Economy, pp. 215, 217.

younger writers in Germany as a mere phrase with which anything and everything is labeled without further study, that is, they stick on this label and then consider the question disposed of. But our conception of history is above all a guide to study, not a lever for construction after the manner of Hegelian. All history must be studied afresh, the conditions of existence of the different formations of society must be examined individually before the attempt is made to deduce from them the political, civil-law, aesthetic, philosophic, religious, etc., views corresponding to them.¹⁴²

In another letter that same year, Engels writes,

. . . According to the materialist conception of history, the ultimately determining element in history is the production and reproduction of real life. More than this neither Marx nor I has ever asserted. Hence if somebody twists this into saying that the economic element is the only determining one, he transforms that proposition into a meaningless, abstract, senseless phrase. The economic situation is the basis, but the various elements of the superstructure--political forms of the class struggle and its results, to wit: constitutions established by the victorious class after a successful battle, etc., juridical forms, and even the reflexes of all these actual struggles in the brains of the participants, political, juristic, philosophical theories, religious views, and their further development into systems of dogmas--also exercise their influence upon the course of the historical struggles and in many cases preponderate in determining their form. There is an interaction of all these elements in which amidst all the endless host of accidents (that is, of things and events under whose interconnection is so remote or so impossible of proof that we can regard it as non-existent, as negligible), the economic movement finally asserts itself as necessary. . . .¹⁴³

¹⁴²Friedrich Engels, "Engels to Conrad Schmidt [London, 5 August 1890]," in Karl Marx and Friederich Engels, Basic Writings on Politics and Philosophy, ed. Lewis S. Feuer (Garden City, N. Y.: Anchor, 1959), pp. 396-97. Hereafter cited as Basic Writings.

¹⁴³Friederich Engels, "Engels to Joseph Bloch [London, 21-22 September 1890]," in Basic Writings, pp. 397-400. Engels' assertion that Marx believed that the

What Marx and Engels do refuse to acknowledge is the separation and isolation of individual areas of activity; neither science, religion, art, or any of their separate branches have any autonomous, inherent history completely divorced from the movement of the history of social production as a totality. However, they never denied the "relative" autonomy in the development of specific areas

superstructure could interact on the base and determine the "form" of historical struggles as clearly born out if one examines Marx's Eighteenth Brumaire. For example, Marx writes:

Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all the dead generations weigh like a nightmare on the brain of the living. And just when they seem engaged in revolutionizing themselves and things, in creating something that has never yet existed, precisely in such periods of revolutionary crisis they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service and borrow from them names, battle cries and costumes in order to present the new scene of world history in this time-honoured disguise and this borrowed language. Thus Luther donned the mask of the Apostle Paul, the Revolution of 1789 to 1814 draped itself alternately as the Roman Republic and the Roman empire, and the Revolution of 1848 knew nothing better to do than to parody, now 1789, now the revolutionary tradition of 1793 to 1795. . . . [speaking of the French Revolution of 1793] But unheroic as bourgeois society is, it nevertheless took heroes, sacrifice, terror, civil war and battles of peoples to bring it into being. And in the classically austere traditions of the Roman republic its gladiators [i.e., the bourgeois] found the ideals and the art forms, the self-deceptions that they needed in order to conceal from themselves the bourgeois limitations of the content of their struggles and to keep their enthusiasm on the high plane of the great historical tragedy. Similarly, at another stage of development, a century earlier, Cromwell and the English people had borrowed speech, passions and illusions from the Old Testament

of human activity. They were fully aware of the power of tradition and understood how an aesthetic concept can be linked to an earlier one or the possibility of one genre developing through various forms. Engels writes,

As to the realms of ideology which soar still higher in the air--religion, philosophy, etc.--these have a prehistoric stock, found already in existence by and taken over in the historical period, of what we should today call bunk. These various false conceptions of nature, of man's own being, of spirits, magic forces, etc., have for the most part only a negative economic element as their basis; the low economic development of the prehistoric period is supplemented and also partially conditioned and even caused by the false conceptions of nature. . . . And to the extent that they form an independent group within the social division of labor, their productions, including their errors, react upon the whole development of society, even on its economic development. But all the same, they themselves are in turn under the dominating influence of economic development.¹⁴⁴

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Political, juridicial, philosophical, religious, literary, artistic, etc., development. But all these react upon one another and also upon the economic basis. It is not that the economic situation is cause, solely active, while everything else is only passive effect. There is, rather, interaction of the basis of economic necessity, which ultimately always asserted itself. . . . So it is not, as people try here and there conveniently to imagine, that the economic situation produces an

for their bourgeois revolution. (pp. 15-17)

In other words, art has a great deal to do with the form which revolutions will take, Demetz, trying to prove that Engels was a "revisionist," omits the line: "More than this neither Marx nor I has ever asserted." Norman Rudich, in his review of Demetz's book, demonstrates how Demetz distorts Engels' view by omitting key sentences in his letters.

¹⁴⁴Friederich Engels, "Engels to Conrad Schmidt [Longon, 27 October 1890]," in Basic Writings, pp. 401-405.

automatic effect. No. Men make their history themselves, only they do so in a given environment, which conditions it, and on the basis of actual relations already existing, among which the economic relations, however much they may be influenced by the other, the political and ideological relations, are still ultimately the decisive ones, forming the keynote which runs through them and alone leads to understanding.¹⁴⁵

Nor, as far as I know, did Marx or Engels ever speak of "class" literature or "proletarian" literature in a strictly deterministic sense. The closest Engels comes to this position is in a letter (April, 1888) to Margaret Harkness, an English socialist writer. Defining "realism," Engels writes,

Realism, to my mind, implies besides truth of detail, the truthful reproduction of typical characters under typical circumstances. Now your characters are typical enough, to the extent that you portray them. But the same cannot be said of the circumstances surrounding them and out of which their action arises. In City Girl the working class appears as a passive mass, incapable of helping itself or even trying to help itself. All attempts to raise it out of its wretched poverty come from the outside, from above. This may have been valid description around 1800 or 1810 in the days of Saint Simon and Robert Owen, but it cannot be regarded as such in 1887 by a man who for almost fifty years has had the honor to participate in most of the struggles of the fighting proletariat and has been guided all the time by the principle that the emancipation of the working class ought to be the cause of the working class itself. The revolutionary response of the members of the working class to the oppression that surrounds them, their convulsive attempts--semiconscious or conscious--to attain their rights as human beings,

¹⁴⁵Friedrich Engels, "Engels to Heinz Starckenburg [London 25 January 1894]," Basic Writings, pp. 410-11.

belong to history and may therefore lay claim to a place in the domain of realism.¹⁴⁶

On the other hand, they did judge the writer's perspective in terms of broadly defined social structures. Man is born into a social structure and into a particular class, but, as Professor Morawski argues, Marx "scoffed at the suggestion that appreciation . . . [of Shakespeare] should be based on whether or not he possessed a 'philosophic system':

. . . They located such values [ideological class values] . . . not in an artist's class or origin but rather in the manifest data of his artworks. As to the ideological equivalents they defined: these were most often of socially broad significance and associated with the artist (Dante, Chateaubriand) with the conscious Weltanschauung of an entire historical class. Sometimes the equivalent was defined more narrowly in association with a particular political outlook (Shelley, Heine, Junges Deutschland). Marx and Engels most frequently took this course in writing of their contemporaries. It was natural that they did so and that they should make much use of the dichotomy of bourgeoisie/proletariat to represent the principal contending positions. But since other, non-predominant classes might simultaneously achieve artistic representation, they did not confine themselves to this formulation; thus mentions of the literary representatives of the shopkeepers in Marx's 18th Brumaire, or the ideological involutions of Goethe which Engels dissects with care. Their use of class analysis is clearly sensitive, flexible, and based upon the work of art. And it is not always the paramount issue, nor is it to be raised in an univocal way.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁶ Frederick Engels, "Letter to Margaret Harkness [April 1888]," in Literature and Art, pp. 41-42.

¹⁴⁷ Morawski, pp. 306, 308.

Instead of asserting a direct cause-effect relationship between the base and the superstructure--which would be more relevant to a mechanical mode of society--Marx and Engels tended to see society as "organism" (e.g., Capital I, p. 10). Marx "started with man in human society, which he regarded as a living phenomenon like a biological organism, with all parts organically interrelated, and the whole more than the total of the parts."¹⁴⁸ The major difference between Marx and most of the other Romantics is that Marx, after the manner of Hegel, believes that,

. . . organic unity is achieved dialectically. In other words, instead of being a simple unity, it is one of contraries within which strong tensions and oppositions are not only permitted but actually required. It is a dynamic unity of content and form in which any given tendency, or "thesis"--because of inner contradictions that reside in the nature of every single thing--gives rise to a counter-tendency, its own antithesis. Inevitably a struggle develops between thesis and antithesis; and out of this warfare there develops a synthesis which itself gives rise to its own antithesis, so that this cyclical process continues indefinitely, and within it progress is possible. But in the stages of each repetition is implicit an idea of growth, maturity, and decay not unlike the life cycle of an organism.¹⁴⁹

Moreover, since we have mentioned Marx's "dramatic" orientation, it is interesting to note that the Hegelian

¹⁴⁸ Donald Drew Egbert, Social Radicalism and the Arts, Western Europe: A Cultural History from the French Revolution to 1968 (New York: Knopf, 1970), p. 97.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 98.

dialectic tends to converge with the dramatic (e.g., witness Hegel's use of it in his analysis of tragedy).

As one philosopher explains it,

The dialectic of Geist is essentially a dynamic and organic process. One "moment" of a dialectical process, when it is fully developed or understood gives rise to its own negation: it is not mechanically confronted by an antithesis. The process here is more like that of a tragedy where the "fall" of the tragic hero emerges from the dynamics of his own character. When Geist is dirempted, alienated from itself, a serious struggle takes place between the two "moments." Out of this conflict and struggle, out of this negativity, emerges a "moment" which at once negates, affirms, and transcends the "moments" involved in the struggle--these earlier moments are aufgehoben.¹⁵⁰

The individual and society, the base and the superstructure, are all interrelated. The "scene" (the world, nature, society, its modes of social production and its corresponding ideological structure) is prior to the individual. As the sociologist, Peter Berger, explains:

I apprehend the reality of everyday life as an ordered reality. Its phenomena are prearranged in patterns that seem to be independent of my apprehension of them and that impose themselves upon the latter. The reality of everyday life appears already objectified, that is, constituted by an order of objects that have been designated as objects before my appearance on the scene. The language used in everyday life continuously provides me with the necessary objectifications and posits the order within which these make sense and within

¹⁵⁰Bernstein, Praxis and Action, p. 20. Bernstein defines aufgehoben as "to negate, affirm and transcend, or go beyond. These are not necessarily three distinct moments, but can be involved in a single process" (p. 18).

which everyday life has meaning for me.¹⁵¹

Man is born into a society with a specific historical mode of social production and an attendant ideology, a specific historical "situation." This "situation" constitutes his scene. In order for social interaction to exist at all, each society is "creative of forms. . . . it has perpetuated and perfected certain forms,"¹⁵² (forms of politeness, aesthetic forms, formal logic, law, etc.) and these forms confront man as objective reality, they are his reality. They are the structure of the scene in and through which he acts. The form of material production is related to (influences and is influenced by) other social forms. Kenneth Burke, for example, writes,

A given material order of production and distribution gives rise to a corresponding set of manners. (In other words, insofar as the productive pattern attains fixity, it engenders fixed habits, typical occupations, stock situations and moral evaluations in keeping. These are all summed up, in human material, as manners). The equivalent of these manners in poetry is style. Style is the ritualistic projection or completion of manners (as when the need of "push" and "drive" in selling attains its stylistic counterpart in the breezy hero). As the productive order changes, manners must adapt themselves accordingly. . . . But by the time the need for this reshaping of manners has risen, a whole tradition of "good style" has evolved and been "bureaucratized" (its embodiment giving new writers

¹⁵¹Berger and Luckmann, The Social Construction of Reality, pp. 21-22.

¹⁵²Lefebvre, p. 46.

the "cues" that induce them to perpetuate its standards).¹⁵³

Part of man's "situation" is the class in which he is situated, and class in Marx is defined not only in terms of man's relationship to the means of production but of his consciousness of his position and his opposition to other classes. But man's actions do not simply "reflect" his class; they are a way of coping with it. Many of the interpreters of Marx have made much of the "reflection" metaphor, and this will be examined in greater detail in the final section of this study. For the moment it should be noted that to the extent that "reflection" is limited to some type of allegorical concept where individuals, actions, works of art are classed and seen as types and manifestations of some social group determined by the economic order at a lower level--Marx's central concept of praxis is also limited. Man's practical and symbolic acts are a reflection of his class. But they are not a reflection of the class itself, of some autonomous, reified category. Rather, they are a reflection of the situation of the class itself--e.g., its struggles with other classes--and of man's situation in that class and his attempts to come to terms with his world (which consists not only of his class but of other classes as well.)

¹⁵³ Kenneth Burke, Attitudes Toward History, 2nd rev. ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1959), p. 201.

Man finds himself in a particular "situation," and, as Kenneth Burke notes, "Situation is but another word for motives."¹⁵⁴ To deal with his situation man acts; he acts practically and verbally. There can be no conscious action without language, "for language is the real practical consciousness, which exists for other human beings, and hence for beings that have become conscious":

Marx discovers that language is not merely the instrument of a pre-existing consciousness. It is at once the natural and the social medium of consciousness, its mode of existence. It comes into being with the need for communication, with human intercourse in the broadest sense. Consequently, being inseparable from language, consciousness is social.¹⁵⁵

Language, "practical consciousness,"¹⁵⁶ this verbal act that enables man to cope with his situation (and transcend it), is itself related to the situation. The "on-going conversation" into which man enters when he is born and which continues after he dies is, as Kenneth Burke argues, "grounded in what Malinowski could call 'contexts of situation.'":

And very important among these "contexts of situation" are the kind of factors considered by Bentham, Marx, and Veblen, the material interests (of private and class structure) that you symbolically defend

¹⁵⁴ Kenneth Burke, The Philosophy of Literary Form: Studies in Symbolic Action (n.p.: Louisiana State University Press, 1941), p. 20.

¹⁵⁵ Lefebvre, pp. 66-67.

¹⁵⁶ The German Ideology, p. 19.

or symbolically appropriate or symbolically align yourself with in the course of making your own assertions. These interests do not "cause" your discussion; its "cause" is in the genius of man himself as homo loquax. But they greatly affect the idiom in which you speak, and to the idiom by which you think. Or, if you would situate the genius of man in a moral aptitude, we could say that this moral aptitude is universally present in all men, to varying degrees, but that it must express itself through a medium, and this medium is in turn grounded in material structures. In different property structures, the moral aptitude has a correspondingly different idiom through which to speak.¹⁵⁷

Literary genres, myths, archetypes, conventions do not appear spontaneously from nowhere; they develop historically from specific situations. They are grounded in central ideologies which arise out of man's necessity to give meaning to his particular social relationships in order that he may act and relate to nature and his fellow men. These ideologies, Northrop Frye calls "myths of concern."¹⁵⁸ These myths "are believed to have really happened, or else to explain or recount something that is centrally important for a society's history, religion, or social structure."¹⁵⁹ Although "literature represents the language of human concern, literature is not itself a myth of concern, but it displays the imaginative possibilities of concern, the total range of verbal fictions

¹⁵⁷ Burke, The Philosophy of Literary Form, pp. 111-12.

¹⁵⁸ Northrop Frye, The Critical Path: An Essay on the Social Context of Literary Criticism (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1971), p. 112.

¹⁵⁹ Frye, p. 34.

and models and images and metaphors out of which all myths of concern are constructed."¹⁶⁰

Language and literature are intensely practical. For Marx, they arise out of man's activity and his need to communicate with his fellow human beings. They function in the symbolic phase of action as imaginative constructs which determine the form the activity will take. They are instrumental in nature, and an "instrument of activity is, as Marx puts it, "a thing, or a complex of things which the labourer interposes between himself and the subject of his labour, and which serves as the conductor of his activity."¹⁶¹ Symbolic systems act as "mediators" and "conductors" because they create the forms by virtue of which action becomes possible; the depiction of ends (or goals) in the imagination directs the action from beginning to end.

Certain aspects of experience--moods, feelings, emotions, perceptions, sensations, and attitudes, e.g., wonder, hatred, relief, boredom, love, etc.--are universal and timeless. So too there will always be mysteries involved in the social hierarchy, of dream, of creation, of death, of adventure and love.¹⁶² However, these

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 98.

¹⁶¹ Capital, I, p. 179.

¹⁶² Kenneth Burke, "Appendix: On Human Behavior Considered 'Dramatistically,'" in Permanence and Change: An Anatomy of Purpose, 2nd rev. ed. (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965), pp. 274-94.

"universal experiences" are made manifest in "specific modes of experience" which "arise out of a relationship between the organism and its environment":

Frustration and gratification of bodily needs; ethical systems; customs; the whole ideology or code of values among which one is raised--these are involved in the modes of experience. . . . The same universal experience could invariably accompany the same mode of experience only if all men's modes of experience were identical. . . . [moreover] Any such specific environmental condition calls forth and stresses certain of the universal experiences as being more relevant to it, with a slighting of those less relevant. Such selections are "patterns of experience."¹⁶³

It is for this reason that Marx can find Greek tragedy and Shakespeare, whose art developed within a different historical situation still relevant to the present time.

Marx's explanation is worth quoting at length:

It is even acknowledged that certain branches of art, e.g., the epos, can no longer be produced in their epoch-making classic form after artistic production as such has begun; in other words, that certain important creations within the compass of art are only possible at an early stage in the development of art. If this is the case with regard to different branches of art within the sphere of art itself, it is not so remarkable that this should also be the case with regard to the entire sphere of art and its relation to the general development of society. The difficulty lies only in the general formulation of these contradictions. As soon as they are reduced to specific questions they are already explained.

Let us take, for example, the relation of Greek art, and that of Shakespeare, to the present time. We know that Greek mythology is not only the arsenal of Greek art, but also its basis. Is the

¹⁶³ Kenneth Burke, Counter-Statement (1931; rpt. Los Altos, Calif.: Hermes, 1953), 149-51.

conception of nature and of social relations which underlies Greek imagination and therefore Greek [art] possible when there are self-acting mules, railroads, locomotives and electric telegraphs? What is a Vulcan compared with Roberts and Co., Jupiter compared with the lightning conductor and Hermes compared with the Credit mobilier? All mythology subdues, controls, and fashions the forces of nature in the imagination and through imagination; it disappears therefore when real control over these forces is established. What becomes of Fama side by side with the Printing House Square? Greek art presupposes Greek mythology, in other words that natural and social phenomena are already assimilated in an unintentionally artistic manner by the imagination of the people. This is the material of Greek art, not just any mythology, i.e. not every unconsciously artistic assimilation of nature (here the term comprises all physical phenomena, including society); Egyptian mythology could never become the basis of or give rise to Greek art. But at any rate [it presupposes] a mythology, on no account however a social development which precludes a mythological attitude toward nature, i.e. any attitude to nature which might give rise to myth; a society therefore demanding from the artist an imagination independent of mythology.

Regarded from another aspect: is Achilles possible when power and shot have been invented? And is the Iliad possible at all when the printing press and even printing machines exist? Is it not inevitable that with the emergence of the press bar the singing and the telling and the muse cease, that is the conditions necessary for epic poetry disappear?

The difficulty we are confronted with is not, however, that of understanding how Greek art and epic poetry are associated with certain forms of social development. The difficulty is that they still give us aesthetic pleasure and are in certain respects regarded as a standard and unattainable ideal.

An adult cannot become a child again, or he becomes childish. But does the naivete of the child not give him pleasure, and does not he himself endeavor to reproduce the child's veracity on a higher level? Does not the child in every epoch represent the character of the period in its natural veracity? Why should not the historical childhood of humanity, where it attained its most beautiful form, exert an eternal charm because it is a stage that will never recur. There are rude

children and precocious children. Many of the ancient peoples belong to this category. The Greeks were normal children. The charm their art has for us does not conflict with the immature stage of the society in which it originated. On the contrary its charm is a consequence of this and is inseparably linked with the fact that the immature social conditions which gave rise, and which alone could give rise, to this art cannot recur.¹⁶⁴

Whatever one thinks of Marx's argument (e.g., the Greeks were "normal children"), it is clear that Marx is trying to account both for the specificity of historical situations and for the way in which art transcends its situation by appealing to universal experiences ("a child's veracity") which may manifest themselves in different modes of experience, depending on the particular historical circumstance (i.e., "reproduce the child's veracity on a higher level").

From the point of view of this study, the most important historical stage that Marx commented on is the rise and development of capitalism, bourgeois society and its attendant superstructure.¹⁶⁵ Marx and Engels describe the process of the destruction of communal tribal society, the gradual growth of productive forces, the progressive division of labor, the beginning of barter trade, the overthrow of "mother-right," the

¹⁶⁴ Karl Marx, Critique of Political Economy, pp. 216-17. (Last italics are mine.)

¹⁶⁵ Marx's and Engels' comments on feudal society will be considered in some detail in the section on William Morris.

beginnings of private property, the development of social classes and class struggles, the beginnings of primitive capital accumulation, the rise of technology and the factory system, etc.--all of which culminate in industrial capitalism and bourgeois society. As George Lichtheim explains, "'bourgeois society' was [for Marx] synonymous with what his liberal contemporaries termed 'civilization,' save that he took a more sombre view of its merits and prospects: it signified both a social whole and a stage in history."¹⁶⁶ On the other hand, Lichtheim notes, "Capitalism refers to the economic relations characteristic of bourgeois society, which as a matter of historical fact has never existed outside Western Europe and the Americas, though in a rudimentary form, it was beginning to develop in Eastern Europe before 1917."¹⁶⁷ It is not surprising, therefore, that most of Marx's and Engels' analyses of bourgeois society were based on their study of German, French, and particular English society.

It is not the purpose of this paper to analyze Marx's and Engels' description of capitalism or bourgeois society. It is sufficient to summarize their assumptions and conclusions regarding this social process. Marx sums it up himself:

¹⁶⁶Lichtheim, p. 139.

¹⁶⁷Ibid., p. 164.

We presupposed private property, the separation of labour, capital and land, hence of wages, profit of capital and rent, likewise the division of labour, competition, the concept of exchange value etc. From political economy itself, in its own words, we have shown that the worker sinks to the level of a commodity, the most miserable commodity; that the misery of the worker is inversely proportional to the power and the volume of his production; that the necessary result of competition is the accumulation of capital in a few hands and thus the revival of monopoly in a more frightful form; and finally that the distinction between capitalist and landowner, between agricultural laborer and industrial worker, disappears and the whole society must divide into the two classes of proprietors and propertyless workers.¹⁶⁸

It is these presuppositions (later fully treated in Capital) and conclusions and the implications they have for art that lead Marx to the conclusion that "capitalist production is hostile to certain aspects of intellectual production, such as art and poetry."¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁸ Karl Marx, "Alienated Labor," in the Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts (1844) in Easton and Guddat, p. 287. Lichtheim explains that what Marx meant by "political economy" is essentially what David Ricardo meant. He quotes Ricardo's Preface to his Principles of Political Economy (1817): "'The produce of the earth--all that is derived from its surface by the united application of labour, machinery and capital--is divided among three classes of the community; namely, the proprietor of the land, the owner of the stock or capital necessary for its cultivation, and the labourers by whose industry it is cultivated. . . . in different stages of society, the proportions of the whole produce of the earth which will be allotted to each of these classes, under the names of rent, profit, wages, will be . . . different . . . to determine the laws which regulate this distribution, is the principal problem in Political Economy.'" (Lichtheim, Marxism, pp. 170-71). Thus, it was Marx's and Engels' intention to expose the "laws of motion" of bourgeois society by describing and interpreting its economic system.

¹⁶⁹ Karl Marx, Theorien ueber den Mehrwert in Literature and Art, p. 28. That bourgeois society is "hostile" to the development of art is, of course, not

There are several reasons for this. For one thing, under capitalism writing was reduced to a trade, to the production of a commodity: moreover, under capitalism, the production of commodities and the exchange of commodities was simply a means to an end--the making of more money, the accumulation of profit.¹⁷⁰ Marx could never think of writing in this way: on the contrary, he argues,

The writer must, naturally, make a living in order to exist and write, but he must not exist and write in order to make a living. . . .

The writer in no way regards his works as a means. They are ends in themselves; so little are they means for him and others that, when necessary, he sacrifices his existence to theirs. . . . The first freedom of the press consists in its not being a business. The writer who debases it to a material means, deserves, as punishment for this inner lack of freedom, an external lack of freedom, namely censorship, or rather its existence is already his punishment.¹⁷¹

Since, for Marx, artistic development does not necessarily parallel economic progress, although it is not totally independent of it, works of art cannot be regarded as economic commodities (as we have argued, they are not "things" but "acts"); under capitalism, however, "all the

original with Marx. Almost all of the Romantics accepted this. For example, Hegel, in his Aesthetic develops this argument. We know that Marx studied Hegel; however, it is Marx that links bourgeois society to the capitalist mode of production.

¹⁷⁰ Cf. Capital, I, pp. 146-98.

¹⁷¹ Karl Marx, "Arbeitslohn," in Lifshitz, The Philosophy of Art of Karl Marx, p. 80.

so-called higher forms of labor--intellectual, artistic, etc.--have been transformed into commodities and have thus lost their former sacredness."¹⁷² Indeed, Marx argues, "even the highest intellectual productions are only recognized and accepted by the bourgeois because they are presented as direct producers of material wealth. . . ." ¹⁷³

This debasement of creative activity, the transformation of artistic works into commodities which serve as a means to some other end, i.e., for profit, for propaganda, etc., constitutes a form of alienation. Alienated labor is "forced labor; it is not the satisfaction of a need but only a means to satisfy other needs. . . . it is not his own but another person's, . . . It belongs to another. It is the loss of his own self."¹⁷⁴ In being potentially able to create "according to the laws of beauty," Marx argues,

. . . man proves himself to be genuinely a species-being. This production is his active species-life. Through it nature appears as his work and his actuality. The object of labor is thus the objectification of man's species life: he produces himself not only intellectually, as in consciousness, but also actively in a real sense and sees himself in a world he made. In taking from man the object

¹⁷² Karl Marx, "Arbeitslohn," in Lifshitz, The Philosophy of Art of Karl Marx, p. 80.

¹⁷³ Karl Marx, Theorien ueber den Mehrwert, p. 31.

¹⁷⁴ Karl Marx, Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts (1844) in Easton and Guddat, p. 293.

of his production, alienated labor takes from his species-life, his actual and objective existence as a species. It changes his superiority to the animal to inferiority, since he is deprived of nature, his inorganic body.

By degrading free spontaneous activity to the level of a means, alienated labor makes the species-life of man a means of his physical existence. . . .

A direct consequence of man's alienation from the product of his work, from his life-activity, and from his species-existence, is the alienation of man from man. When man confronts himself, he confronts other men. What holds true of man's relationship to his work, to the product of his work and to himself, also holds true of man's relationship to other men, to their labor, and the object of their labor.¹⁷⁵

Moreover, if art is converted into a commodity, then, in a capitalist society, its value must be expressed in monetary terms. Money "serves as a universal measure of value."¹⁷⁶ And it is the virtue of money that it can translate quality into quantity. Melvin Rader argues,

The emphasis upon money, characteristic of a capitalistic society, also has an alienating effect. Money tends to reduce qualitative values to quantitative abstractions, such as dollars and cents. But this reduction is a mutilation, since human values in their integrity are irreducibly qualitative: love, courage, honour, for instance, has each its individualized quality as intuited in the concrete moment of life. This pre-eminently is true of aesthetic values, whose vivid, unique and diverse characteristics are never reducible to a homogeneous monetary measure.¹⁷⁷

But as Marx says, "objects that in themselves are no commodities, such as conscience, honour, etc., are capable

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 295.

¹⁷⁶ Capital, I, p. 94.

¹⁷⁷ Rader, "Marx's Interpretation of Art and Aesthetic Value," p. 241.

of being offered for sale by their holders, and of thus acquiring, through their price, the form of commodities."¹⁷⁸

Money, then, appears as this overturning power, both against the individual and against the bonds of society, etc., which claim to be essences in themselves. It transforms fidelity into infidelity, love into hate, virtue into vice, vice into virtue, servant into master, master into servant, idiocy into intelligence, and intelligence into idiocy.

Since money, as the existing and active concept of value, confounds and exchanges all things, it is the general confounding and compounding of all things--the world upside down--the confounding and compounding of all natural and human qualities.¹⁷⁹

But in capitalist society use-value--value determined to the extent that it satisfies a human need, something "useful"--is transformed into exchange-value--value determined to the extent that it can be exchanged for other commodities whose value is quantitatively determined by money. In a truly human, non-alienated relationship, this "confounding" would be impossible:

Assume man to be man and his relationship to the world to be a human one; then you can exchange love only for love, trust for trust, etc. If you want to enjoy art, you must be an artistically cultivated person; if you want to exercise influence over other people, you must be a person with a stimulating and encouraging effect on other people. Every one of your relations to man and to nature must be a specific expression, corresponding to the object of your will, of your real individual life. If you love without evoking love in return--that is, if your loving as loving does not produce reciprocal love; if through a living expression of yourself as a loving person you do not make yourself

¹⁷⁸ Capital, I, p. 102.

¹⁷⁹ Karl Marx, "The Power of Money in Bourgeois Society," in The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844, ed. Dirk Struik, p. 169.

a loved person, then your love is impotent--a misfortune.¹⁸⁰

According to Marx the realization of this truly human relationship could only be brought about by a social revolution. Already within this particular scene (i.e., a bourgeois society), by the dialectic of history, there are forces working for a revolutionary change. Capitalism and bourgeois society have generated their antithesis in the form of the proletariat which, through the act of revolution, will change the scene, and, in the process, change themselves. Man will overcome his alienation and labor (including artistic activity) will again express the "whole" man and his species-life. The consequences of the revolution would be, as Robert Tucker argues, that,

After acquiring mastery of his productive powers and freedom to produce in a human way, man would re-fashion his own objectified nature according to the laws of beauty. Instead of confronting him as negations of himself, alien and hostile beings, the objects of his production would bring him self-confirmation. In addition to developing his productive talents in all directions, he would develop his capacity for aesthetic experience. His five senses would be cleansed gradually of the possessiveness, the "sense of having," that had always in the past defiled them and prevented him from perceiving and appreciating the intrinsic aesthetic quality of objects outside him.¹⁸¹

In another study Tucker argues that after the revolution, "productive activity will become joyous

¹⁸⁰ Karl Marx, loc. cit.

¹⁸¹ Robert Tucker, The Marxian Revolutionary Idea (New York: W. W. Norton, 1969), p. 221.

creation. Man will produce things spontaneously for the sheer pleasure it gives him to do so, will develop his manifold potentialities in every sphere." He continues,

Marx's conception of ultimate communism is fundamentally aesthetic in character. His utopia is an aesthetic ideal of the future man-nature relationship, which he sees in terms of artistic creation and appreciation of the beauty of the man-made environment by its creator. The acquisitive and therefore alienated man of history is to be succeeded by the post-historical aesthetic man who will be "rich" in a new way. Marx describes him as "the rich man profoundly endowed with all the senses," adding: "The rich human being is simultaneously the human being in need of a totality of human life activities." In Marx's view, the relationship of this new man to nature--that is, to his own anthropological nature--will be that of an artist. Man will realize his natural tendency to arrange things "according to the laws of beauty." Economic activity will turn into artistic activity with industry as the supreme avenue of creation, and the planet itself will become the new man's work of art. The alienated world will give way to the aesthetic world.¹⁸²

The actor, the scene, the act, the medium, and the purpose--from the point of view of motivation--would all come under the terminology of aesthetics.

Agency and Creative Activity

The agency or medium of artistic activity of writing in particular is the writer's perceptual and imaginative sensitivity and his ability to use language. From Marx's point of view, both of these elements are socially determined and are products of specific historical

¹⁸²Tucker, Philosophy and Myth in Karl Marx, pp. 157-58.

conditions. As for the first, Marx writes,

. . . the senses and minds of other men have become my own appropriation. Thus besides these direct organs [i.e., man's five senses], social organs are constituted, in the form of society; for example, activity in direct association with others has become an organ for the manifestation of life and a mode of appropriation of human life. . . .

Man's musical sense is only awakened by music. The most beautiful music has no meaning for the non-musical ear, is not an object for it, because my object can only be the confirmation of one of my own faculties. It can only be so for me in so far as my faculty exists for itself as a subjective capacity, because the meaning of an object for me extends only so far as the sense extends (only makes sense for an appropriate sense). For this reason, the senses of social man are different from those of non-social man [i.e., if such a man could exist]. It is only through the objectively deployed wealth of the human being that the wealth of subjective human sensibility (a musical ear, an eye which is sensitive to the beauty of form, in short, senses which are capable of human satisfaction and which confirm themselves as human faculties) is cultivated or created. For it is not only the five senses, but also the so-called spiritual senses, the practical senses (desiring, loving, etc.), in brief, human sensibility and the human character of the senses, which can only come into being through the existence of its object, through humanized nature. The cultivation of the five senses is the work of all previous history [italics mine--ce]. Sense which is subservient to crude needs has only a restricted meaning. For a starving man the human form of food does not exist, but only its abstract character as food. It could just as well exist in the most crude form, and it's impossible to say in what way this feeding-activity would differ from that of animals. The needy man, burdened with cares, has no appreciation of the most beautiful spectacle. The dealer in minerals sees only their commercial value, not their beauty of their particular characteristics; he has no mineralogical sense. Thus the objectification of the human essence, both theoretically and practically, is necessary in order to humanize man's senses, and also to create the human senses corresponding to all the wealth of human and natural being.¹⁸³

¹⁸³ Karl Marx, Early Writings, pp. 161-62.

Through his own activity, man changes nature and himself, including both his senses which are dependent on his physiology and his "so-called spiritual senses, the practical senses (desiring, loving, etc.)."

As for the second, it has been noted that Marx conceives of language as a "social product"¹⁸⁴ which arises in man's need to act with other men on nature and themselves.¹⁸⁵ Language, as it constitutes the symbolic phases of action (e.g., in Marx's architect), frees the imagination for necessary investigation of various possibilities in action; it must integrate imagination and reason. And, inasmuch as man creates "according to the laws of beauty," ideally it should also satisfy the desire for aesthetic experience. This symbolic phase of action as it is objectified in literature, is one means by which desire, imagination, and reason find integration. As Professor Morawski argues, "Marx deems aesthetic experience to possess a synthetic character: as a commingling of intellectual, emotional, and sensual elements, it is

¹⁸⁴ Capital, I, p. 74.

¹⁸⁵ German Ideology, p. 19. Although Marx says that "language is as old as consciousness," with consciousness arising in man's activities, Engels was later more explicit in making labor prior to language. In his essay, "The Part Played by Labour in Transition from Ape to Man (1876)--in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, Selected Works, In One Volume (New York: International Publishers, 1969), p. 361--Engels writes: "First labour, after it and then with it, speech." For an expansion of Engels' thesis along Marxist lines, see Ernst Fischer, The Necessity of Art: A Marxist Approach, trans. Anna Bostock (London: Penguin, 1964), pp. 23-48.

a-theoretical. Thus in Marx's Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy, the intellectual and the religious appropriations of reality are explicitly distinguished from the artistic."¹⁸⁶

Action takes place in certain "forms," and in order to understand human action it is necessary to comprehend the symbol system in which these actions are depicted. This is true for the most "instinctive" and basic "drives" so that even "for Freud there is no such thing as an instinct or drive (Trieb) in its pure or physical state; all drives are mediated through images or fantasies, through their object language, through what Freud calls . . . the 'representational presentation.'"¹⁸⁷ Moreover, what "forms" or "symbolic systems" are available to man determine what he can express (unless, like the artist, he creates new forms to deal with a problematic situation).

In addition, these forms and symbolic systems are not eternal. Since they are social products, they are subject to historical change. Language, the collective inventory, what the writer is given and style (or form), what is chosen, the manner of composition, are both subject to historical change, which must be understood by reference to the social process as a whole. Marx agrees,

¹⁸⁶ Morawski, p. 306.

¹⁸⁷ Jameson, Marxism and Form, p. 99.

"le style, c'est l'homme," but man exists only as social man.¹⁸⁸ Hence, Robert Escarpit argues, "the style is not only the man, it is also the society. Style is, in sum, the community of assumptions transposed into forms, themes and images."¹⁸⁹

Situations change, society changes and the language and style for dealing with the novel situations change

¹⁸⁸ Marx and Engels were not insensitive to individual stylistics; however, they usually tried to relate a writer's style and its function to something more than mere eccentricity. For example, Marx and Engels write of Carlyle:

As with Carlyle's ideas, so with his style. It is a direct and violent reaction against the modern bourgeois English Pecksniff style, whose stilted superficiality, circumspect verbosity, and confused moral-sentimental tediousness has spread from its original inventors, the educated Cockneys, over all English literature. By contrast, Carlyle handles the English language as if it were completely raw material which he has to recast from the ground up. Archaic words and expressions are revived and new ones invented in the German manner, particularly in the manner of Jean-Paul Richter. This new style was often overinflated and tasteless, but at times brilliant and always original.

(Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, "Book Review of Latter-Day Phamphlets, No. 1, The Present Time, No. 2, Model Prisions," in Literature and Art, p. 118.)

¹⁸⁹ Robert Escarpit, Sociology of Literature, trans. Ernest Pick (London: Frank Cass and Company, Ltd., 1971), p. 80. If one can translate "community of assumptions" into "a system of norms of ideal concepts," Escarpit is close to René Wellek's definition:

The work of art, then, appears as an object of knowledge sui generis which has a special ontological status. It is neither real (like a statue) nor mental (like the experience of light or pain) nor ideal (like a triangle). It is a system of norms of ideal concepts which are intersubjective. They must be assumed to exist in collective ideology, changing with it, accessible only through individual mental experience, based on the sound-structure of its sentences.

(René Wellek and Austin Warren, Theory of Literature, 2nd ed. [New York: Harcourt Brace and World, 1956], p. 144.)

accordingly. It is for this reason that Arnold Hauser argues,

. . . the history of style cannot do away with either psychological or sociological causation. It will never be possible to explain by purely formal, stylistic considerations why a line of artistic development breaks off at a certain point and gives place to a completely different one instead of going on to further progress and expansion--in short, why a change occurred just when it did. The "climax of a line of development cannot be foretold on the basis of formal criteria; revolution occurs when a certain style is no longer adapted to expressing the spirit of the time, something that depends on psychological and social conditions. Change of style, no doubt, occurs in a direction determined from within; but there are always a number of possible directions, and in any case the 'maturity' of choice is never fixed in advance or secure from the unforeseeable.¹⁹⁰

Style, as an agency for embodying "community assumptions" and as a medium for "expressing the spirit of the time," is also more than this. In a social perspective, "style is ingratiating . . . a way of establishing mutual ingratiating by the saying of the right things."¹⁹¹ Style is also a means of identification:

Style itself is an aspect of identification. Styles evoke a hallowed past, or a cherished future, as we try to act well in the present. Even a materially dispossessed immigrant or poor youth may "own" privilege vicariously by adopting the style of a privileged class. Thus a Polish immigrant buys an "American Colonial" house, or a high school boy borrows expensive adult clothing and a car to "date" his girl (who in turn boasts symbolically by wearing clothes borrowed from older

¹⁹⁰ Arnold Hauser, The Philosophy of Art History (New York: Knopf, 1959), p. 14.

¹⁹¹ Kenneth Burke, Permanence and Change, pp. 50-51.

sisters and her parents). Such "symbolic boasting" is a clue to social identification; it tells us to whom people want to belong.¹⁹²

Carlyle understood the symbolic power of clothes as a means of identification, and, as Professor Roach points out, the clothing can have both an "expressive" and an "instrumental" function:

The expressive function involves the emotional and communicative aspects of dress. Through dress one may express individuality by stressing unique physical features or by using unique aesthetics. Or through dress one may express group affiliation or the values and standards of the group. In an expressive sense, therefore, clothing divulges something about each human being--his beliefs, his sentiments, his status and rank, his place in the power structure. Hence, where he fits into his society and how he relates to others composing it. Dress may symbolize ties to specific social groups such as family, social class, occupation, or religion.

Clothing may be instrumental, involving rational use of dress in goal-directed behavior. Clothing may be utilitarian and protective; it may be used to attain desired rewards. Some rewards may be subtle, such as broad feelings of comfort and security. More specific rewards may be getting a job, winning friends, or finding a partner for marriage. The cliché, "clothes make the man" suggests a common understanding in American society that clothing may be employed to change status, perhaps to move from one social class to another. The calculated use of special changes in status and accompanying changes in the rights and privileges of those involved is instrumental in nature.¹⁹³

Moreover, what is true of style in dress, etiquette (any social form) is also true, for the most part,

¹⁹²Duncan, Communication and Social Order, p. 112.

¹⁹³Mary Ellen Roach and Joanne Bubolz Eicher, eds., Dress, Adornment and the Social Order (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1965), p. 6.

of style in literature. Erich Auerbach, for example, points out how "the serious, problematic, and tragic conception of any character regardless of type and social standing, of any occurrence regardless of whether it be legendary, broadly political, or narrowly domestic" was "completely impossible in antiquity." There could be "no serious literary treatment of everyday occupations and social classes. . . ." They could be treated only on the level of the comic, and their "relation to the social whole is either a matter of clever adaptation or of grotesquely blameworthy isolation. In the latter case, the realistically portrayed individual is always in the wrong in his conflict with the social whole, which is represented as a given fact, an institution unalterably established in the background of the action and requiring no explanation in regard to either its origin or its effects."¹⁹⁴ From another perspective, William Empson writes of the "suggestion of pastoral" form in proletarian literature.¹⁹⁵ Roland Barthes writes of the way in which the use of the French narrative past (the preterite) is a form of identification and social alignment:

The narrative past is therefore a part of a security system for Belles-Lettres. Being the image of an

¹⁹⁴ Erich Auerbach, Mimesis; The Representation of Reality in Western Culture (Garden City, New York: Anchor, 1953), p. 27.

¹⁹⁵ William Empson, Some Versions of Pastoral (Norfolk, Conn.: New Directions, 1960), p. 6.

order, it is one of those numerous formal pacts made between the writer and society for the justification of the former and the serenity of the latter.¹⁹⁶

Even the destruction or obliteration of clearly identifiable styles has a social function:

Writing [at the present moment in history] therefore is a blind alley, and it is because society itself is a blind alley. The writers of today feel this; for them, the search for a non-style or an oral style, for a zero level or a spoken level of writing is, all things considered, the anticipation of a homogeneous social state; most of them understand that there can be no universal language outside the concrete, and no longer a mystical or merely nominal universality of society.¹⁹⁷

Thus, the form in which the writer individuates his medium constitutes a social as well as a personal decision. Kenneth Burke puts it this way: "The words of the poet are not puppets, but acts. They are a function of him, and he is a function of them. They are a function of society, and he is a function of society."¹⁹⁸

Purpose and Function in the Creative Act

As we have seen, Marx views writing not as a means to some end but as an end in itself; writing must not be reduced to a business. On the other hand, all creative activity does serve some purpose. The function of the

¹⁹⁶ Roland Barthes, Writing Degree Zero, p. 32.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 87.

¹⁹⁸ Kenneth Burke, Attitudes Toward History, p. 336.

work of art as it is experienced by the audience will be discussed in detail in a subsequent section; for the moment, the focus will be on what the creative act does for the artist. In free, creative activity, man discovers himself; in his symbolic acts he objectifies his "individuality and its particularity," and he experiences the "individual joy" of knowing his personality as an "objective, sensuously perceptible, and indubitable power." In his activity, man confirms and realizes his "true human and social nature."¹⁹⁹ He objectifies his individuality by expressing himself in a particular style, and his product is "objective and sensuously perceptible," because he has expressed himself in a system of consensually validated symbols, forms, images, metaphors, etc. Because it is consensually validated, it has meaning. In his exploration and communication of the possibilities of human action, he discovers what it means and feels like to be human. The writer's symbolic act does not make him "different" from his audience; in order to consciously act at all, all men must experience the symbolic phase of action and its emotional quality. The major difference is that the writer is able to solve for himself the problem of expression, "whereas the audience can express it [the

¹⁹⁹Karl Marx, "Feuerbachian Criticism of Hegel," Easton and Guddat, p. 281.

emotional quality] only when the author has shown them how":

The author is not unique in having an emotion, he is unique in his ability to take the initiative in expressing what all feel but what the author alone can bring to some kind of form which "clarifies" what is felt.²⁰⁰

As Marx puts it, in human, creative activity the artist acts as a "mediator" between men; in experiencing a work of art, the audience would experience a "reintegration" of its own nature.²⁰¹

The "joy" for the artist comes in his confirmation and realization of his "true human and social nature." At the same time, in free, creative activity there is joy in the activity itself because there is no separation of ends and means; it is non-alienating labor. The ends infuse the means from the very beginning, and it is the experience of the ends, the consummation, that produces joy and satisfaction, i.e., an aesthetic experience. This is precisely William Morris' definition of art. As Dewey says,

Pleasures may come about through chance contact and stimulation; such pleasures are not to be despised in a world full of pain. But happiness and delight are a different sort of thing. They come through fulfillment that reaches to the depths of our being.²⁰²

²⁰⁰Duncan, Language and Literature in Society, p. 5.

²⁰¹Karl Marx, "Feuerbachian Criticism of Hegel," loc. cit.

²⁰²John Dewey, Art as Experience (New York: Minton, Balch and Co., 1934), p. 15.

According to Dewey there is an aesthetic element in all activity, "provided that it is integrated and moves by its own urge to fulfillment."²⁰³ And "the esthetic quality that rounds out an experience into completeness and unity" is emotional.²⁰⁴ Emotion is the unifying element that gives unity (and hence meaning and quality) to the activity. However, in most of man's activities, particularly in his state of alienated labor ("degrading free spontaneous activity to means"), he seldom experiences the fruits or consummatory satisfactions that go with finality. Labor is fragmented and meaningless; man does not possess his own products. What is peculiar to art is "its power to catch the enjoyment that belongs to the consummation, the outcome, of an undertaking, and to give the implements, the objects that are instrumental in the undertaking, and to the acts that compose it something of the joy and satisfaction that suffuse its successful accomplishment. . . . Normal aesthetic delight in creation is the recovery of the sense of the final outcome in the partial achievement, and gives assurance to the interest of creation."²⁰⁵ Marx's architect achieves the enjoyment

²⁰³ Ibid., p. 39.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 41.

²⁰⁵ George Herbert Mead, Selected Writings, ed. and intro. Andrew J. Reck (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1964), pp. 296, 299.

that comes in the consummation of a "partial achievement" as he constructs in his imagination, "according to the laws of beauty," before he builds.

Again, this is not to argue that the moment of consummation is unique to artistic activity. As Dewey argues, it is characteristic of all integrated experience; it is a phase of the act, not a different kind of act. However, other forms of activities do not carry with them the spectrum of finalities of action that are created and experienced in art. Most of man's experience may be divided into doing (means) and enjoying (ends) and their opposites, but often finalities are not achieved or they lack structure and clarity (this may explain why myths of origin and eschatology are so powerful). The recovery of the sense of the final outcome in "partial achievement" is characteristic of artistic activity and of aesthetic states of consciousness.²⁰⁶ Furthermore, without these finalities, man could not know what action means because he would not be able to experience the emotions which only the finalities of action evoke. Even in thinking, Dewey argues, "premises emerge only as a conclusion becomes manifest. . . . A 'conclusion' is no separate and

²⁰⁶ In art, order is called "form," and Kenneth Burke in Counter-Statement (p. 124) writes: "Form in literature is an arousing and fulfillment of desire. A work has form in so far as one part of it leads a reader to anticipate another part, to be gratified by the sequence."

independent thing; it is the consummation of a movement."²⁰⁷ For Dewey (and Marx) any work becomes art so long as there is a sense of the whole which is being completed in the work (i.e., it is non-alienating), but for Marx, such a sense is absent from most labor in bourgeois society. The ends of labor are far removed and inconsistent with the work at hand. The imagination is deprived of its normal integrative function. Thus Marx writes, "This economic order condemns men to such desolate and bitter degradation, that by comparison savagery appears a royal condition."²⁰⁸

The Literary Criticism
of Marx and Engels

Marx's and Engels' criticism of various specific works of literature is scattered throughout their works and letters, and these remarks do not form a systematic whole upon which a theory of literature can be based. Indeed, as I have tried to demonstrate in the preceding discussion, Marx and Engels are more concerned with the nature of creative activity itself, the conditions under which this activity can occur, the relationship between material production and creative praxis, and the function of this activity in society. They did make some specific

²⁰⁷ Dewey, p. 38.

²⁰⁸ Karl Marx, Early Writings, p. 81.

observations on literature, but, as William Phillips argues, "the truth of the matter is that Marx was not a literary critic, and no amount of textual research can convert him into one."²⁰⁹ Marx and Engels were philosophers and social critics, and one can develop an aesthetic and method of criticism from their works, but it is not quite true as Phillips argues that "they were silent on those internal questions of literature which occupy modern critics."²¹⁰ It has been shown that aesthetic problems occupied a prominent place in all of Marx's and Engels' thinking. It is also a fact that both Marx and Engels were familiar with the critical discussions and literary questions of their day.²¹¹ Marx, for example, by 1837 had studied and taken notes on Lessing's Laocoon, Winckelmann's History of Ancient Art, and Hegel's Aesthetik.²¹² It is also known that the young Marx had intended to publish a "Treatise on Christian Art," which was to appear in Bruno Bauer's Trumpet Voice, or Final Judgment on Hegel, Atheist and Anti-Christ, that he intended to write an article on aesthetics for Charles Anderson Dana's New American Cyclopedia, and that he wanted to write a

²⁰⁹ William Phillips, "The Esthetic of the Founding Fathers," Partisan Review, 4, No. 4 (1938), 13.

²¹⁰ Phillips, loc. cit.

²¹¹ Cf. Demetz, pp. 1-169.

²¹² Lifshitz, The Philosophy of Art of Karl Marx, p. 7.

book on Balzac after he had finished Capital.²¹³ In fact, however, these projects never came to fruition.

On the other hand, I have tried to show that Marx's and Engels' standards were very high, that they appreciated the highest creative achievements--Aeschylus, Dante, Shakespeare, Goethe, Balzac--and that they took literature seriously, not as an epiphenomenon, but as a central and constituent mode of experience. Most of their literary observations are based on first impressions and their own prejudices. For example, Marx admired Diderot, particularly his Le Neveu de Rameau (Rameau's Nephew), but he hated almost all of the French Romantics, especially Chateaubriand.²¹⁴ In very few of their specific pieces of criticism is there a fully worked out method or even an attempt to justify their appreciation or disdain. Hence, it seems fruitless to simply catalogue their observations. On the other hand, there is ample evidence in their critical writing to demonstrate that the

²¹³ See E. Troschenko, "Marx on Literature," *International Literature*, 6 (March, 1934), 138.

²¹⁴ Marx, in a letter to Engels, says of Chateaubriand:

If he has become so famous in France, it is because in every respect he is the most classic incarnation of French vanity, and he embodies this vanity not in a light and frivolous eighteenth century sense, but in romantic dress, flaunting newly hatched expressions, false depth, Byzantine exaggeration, toying with emotions, many-colored sheen, word painting, theatrical sublime, in a word, a mishmash of lies, never before achieved in form and content.

("Letter to Engels [30 November 1873]," Literature and Art, p. 133.

major elements of their critical practice are, for the most part, consistent with their conception of man's creative praxis and with their world view in general.

The Form and Content
of the Symbolic Act

Marx and Engels' theoretical view of man as a creature of praxis, which is essentially dramatic in structure, is nowhere more apparent than in their literary criticism. They are constantly emphasizing action and drama. In writing to Ferdinand Lassalle concerning his drama of the Reformation and the Peasants' War, Franz von Sickingen (1859), both Marx and Engels stress the necessity of dramatic action over exposition. After comparing Lassalle's tendency to "Schillerize" ("making individuals the mere mouthpieces of the spirit of the times") with Marx's preference to "Shakespeareanize," Marx says, "In many places I must reproach you with too much discussion of themselves by the characters, which is also due to your bias for Schiller."²¹⁵ Engels too recognized Lassalle's preference for Schiller and realized that because of the lengthy monologues the play is "impossible to stage." He praised Lassalle for recognizing the "difference between a stage play and a literary play," and

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"Marx and Engels to Lassalle," International Literature, 4 (October, 1933), 119.

argues that without good dialogue the play would suffer. A great drama, however, combines in "perfect blending" "great intellectual depth and historical content . . . with Shakespearean vivacity and wealth of action."²¹⁶ Engels adds, "According to my view on the drama, the realistic should not be overlooked because of the intellectual elements, Shakespeare for Schiller; . . ."²¹⁷

The ideas, the intellectual content of the writing should not be explicitly proclaimed by the writer but should emerge from the action and the situation. This is true not only of the drama, which by necessity must be lively and dramatic, but of fiction as well. In a letter (November, 1885) to Minna Kautsky on her novel of the Austrian salt miners, Old and New (1885), Engels writes,

I am not at all an opponent of tendencious poetry as such. The father of tragedy Aeschyles [sic.] and the father of comedy Aristophanes were both clearly outspoken tendencious poets, and exactly the same way Dante and Cervantes, and the main merit of Schiller's Craft and Loves is that it is the first

²¹⁶ Ibid., p. 120.

²¹⁷ Ibid., p. 121. Demetz, with little justification, argues that Marx and Engels were basing their criticism of Lassalle's play on Hegel (although Demetz himself gives Hegel almost no credit for influencing Marx and Engels); on the contrary, Marx and Engels were reacting against Lassalle's Hegelianism and his belief that "the dialectics of a deeply intellectual, internally inevitable, and therefore infinite conflict of ideas is . . . of itself a deeply tragic motive as can be proved by antique tragedy, . . ." (see "Manuscript of the Tragic Idea, Enclosed with Lassalle's Letter of March 6, 1859," in "Marx and Engels to Lassalle," p. 114). Their criticism of Lassalle's tendency toward abstraction in drama is the same criticism, in essence, that they leveled at Hegel.

German political propaganda drama. Contemporary Russian and Norwegian writers, who are writing superlative novels, are all tendencious. But I think that the bias should flow by itself from the situation and action, without particular indications, and the writer is not obliged to obtrude on the reader the future historical solution of the social conflicts pictured.²¹⁸

Engels is also concerned with developing sufficient motivation for action--"Whether the motivation of the action in this part of your work does not develop a little hastily"²¹⁹--and the necessity of dramatic foreshadowing.²²⁰ For both Marx and Engels, ideas and abstract thinking are very important, but they must originate and develop in human action. As Marx says in his "Theses on Feuerbach," "The question whether objective [gegenstandliche] truth can be attributed to human thinking is not a question of theory but is a practical question. In practice man must prove the truth, that is, the reality and power, the this-sidedness [Diesseitigkeit] of his thinking. . . . Feuerbach, not satisfied with abstract thinking, appeals to sensuous contemplation: but he does not conceive sensuousness as practical, human sensuous activity."²²¹ It is praxis in which man confirms his humanity, and for

²¹⁸F. Schiller, "Friedrich Engels on Literature," International Literature, 2 (1933), 122.

²¹⁹Schiller, loc. cit.

²²⁰"Marx and Engels to Lassalle," p. 121.

²²¹Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, Selected Works, pp. 28-29.

Marx and Engels, this holds for art as well as life.

Moreover, if the structure of the symbolic act is dramatic, then its essential element is conflict. Marx writes that "at a certain stage of development, the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing relations of production or--this merely expresses the same thing in legal terms--with the property relations within the framework of which they have operated hitherto."²²² But, he adds that it is in the "ideological forms"--law, politics, religion, art, etc.--that "men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out."²²³ Because man is always moving into a future that is not totally known or controlled, action is by its very nature problematic (hence, the value of art as a model, of its depiction of the meaning and quality of the possibilities of human action). With the division of labor and the existence of classes, there exists the possibility, indeed the inevitability, of a conflict in roles. On a larger scale, there is acute social conflict:

In the great acts of social life--birth, marriage, and death--there is intense rivalry for the use and control of highly communicable social symbols. Who should control the burial of the dead? The church wants death rituals kept sacred and performed in church. But those who wish to honor their dead in societies where social position depends on proper communication of wealth cannot be satisfied

²²² Karl Marx, Critique of Political Economy, p. 20.

²²³ Ibid., p. 21.

with a simple church funeral, however holy. A church wedding or a simple civil ceremony in the registry will satisfy the needs but not the status needs of the bride and groom (and certainly not their parents). So, too, in birth ceremonies where the contesting claims of the state, church, family, and hospital must be resolved. Even in caste societies where individuals are subject to rigid control, profoundly different social claims struggle for domination within the heart of noble and commoner alike.²²⁴

On an even more general level than the institutional, Marx and Engels trace the development of class structures as a result of the division of labor and the handing-down of property. With different social relationships--conflict is inevitable. In one of the most famous lines of the Communist Manifesto Marx and Engels declare, "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles."²²⁵ These conflicts, on the personal, institutional and class levels, enter into and shape man's consciousness and give shape to his action. Furthermore, these conflicts are expressed and fought out in various symbolic systems ("ideological forms") including literature. Every work of literature depicts, to a greater or lesser degree, aspects of these conflicts and great literature will embody all of them. All conflict is at once

²²⁴Duncan, Communication and Social Order, p. 278.

²²⁵Engels notes in the English edition of 1888 that they mean "all written history. . . . With the dissolution of . . . primaevial communities society begins to be differentiated into separate and finally antagonistic classes" (Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, Selected Works, pp. 35-36).

individual and social, just as all characters are simultaneously individual and universal.

Agent in the Symbolic Act

Marx's and Engels' admiration for Shakespeare (as opposed to Schiller) was based, for the most part, on Shakespeare's ability to create "realistic" characters, characters who are individuals and who, at the same time, are representative. According to Marx, "Though man is unique individual--and it is just his particularity which makes him an individual, a really individual social being--he is equally the whole."²²⁶ That is to say, man and his actions are at once particular and universal, individual and representative of his "species-life" (i.e., of humanity in general or society). At the same time, the individual or society cannot be reduced to any "essence" (except praxis); they assume definite and specific form in history, and history is constantly changing through man's actions, in which he changes nature and himself. Thus, literature, if indeed it is an examination of the possibilities of human action, to be successful must manifest in its depiction of action and character the "concrete universal." Characters should not be "the mere mouthpieces of the spirit of the times." Marx complains to Lassalle that his characters are too abstract

²²⁶Karl Marx, Selected Writings in Sociology and Social Philosophy, p. 77.

and that he finds no "characteristic traits" in them (i.e., "individual" traits). "And yet," Marx argues, "is there another period with such sharp characters as the XVI century?"²²⁷ Similarly, Engels praises Lassalle's principal characters because they "represent definite classes and tendencies and hence definite ideas of their time and the motives of their individual actions are to be found not in trivial individual desires but in the historical stream upon which they are being carried."²²⁸ At the same time, he criticizes Lassalle for being "too abstract," and for not giving enough attention to "a Falstaffian background" where he could show a "variety of quaintly characteristic characters."²²⁹ Engels sums up the concept in his letter to Minna Kautsky: "Each person is a type, but at the same time completely defined personality--'this one' as old Hegel would say."²³⁰ In Marx's and Engels' conception, typically it is not to be opposed to individuality; each character is simultaneously a type and a particular individual.

Type does not mean "average." The essential characteristic of the type is that it contains the most significant social, ethical, and spiritual conflicts of the

²²⁷ "Marx and Engels to Lassalle," pp. 118-19.

²²⁸ Ibid., p. 120.

²²⁹ Ibid., p. 121.

²³⁰ Schiller, p. 122.

particular historical moment. (It is for this reason that Marx questions Lassalle's choice of Sickingen as the hero of his play and argues for Goethe's choice of Goetz von Berlichingen as the ideal type to represent the conflict.²³¹ Through the depiction of a type, the specific, universal and necessary qualities--what is constant and what is historically determined, what is individual and what is socially determined--are realized in literature. Obviously, this does not necessitate photographic realism or the Naturalism of a Zola; Marx and Engels use Shakespeare as the model of a writer who most fully created "realistic" characters. In reviewing two books on the 1848 Revolution, Marx and Engels call for characters to "be finally depicted in strong Rembrandtian colors, in all their living qualities." The two books "go into the private lives of these people, showing them in carpet slippers, together with their whole entourage of satellites of various kinds. But that does not mean that they are any nearer a true and honest presentation of persons and events."²³²

²³¹"Marx and Engels to Lassalle," p. 118.

²³²Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, "Book Review of A. Chenu: Les Conspirateurs, Paris, 1850; and Lucien de la Hodde: La Naissance de la République en Février 1848, Paris, 1850," in Literature and Art, p. 40.

Agency in the Symbolic Act

Although Marx and Engels are sensitive to the technical resources available to a writer, they say very little of substance about the internal organization of literary works or about stylistic problems. They often make a passing remark on the quality of versification (e.g., to Lassalle), the tone (e.g., the "righteous indignation" of Carlyle) or the "flaunting newly hatched expressions" and "Byzantine exaggeration" in the stylistics of a Chateaubriand, but they seldom make explicit in any systematic way their views on the relationship between form and content. They are interested in literature not so much in terms of its internal unity as in its relationship to praxis.²³³ Marx, in his Contributions to the Critique of Political Economy, did discuss the evolution of various genres and their dependence on both "the stimulus of past aesthetic achievement upon the present aesthetic project . . . and, . . . the stimulus given the aesthetic field by that which is in other respects external to it, "i.e., the material conditions and their corresponding social relations."²³⁴

²³³ Indeed, I would doubt whether Marx and Engels could even think of literature and criticism as fundamentally concerned with the "problem of unity," which Cleanth Brooks, in his "The Formalistic Critic," argues is the primary concern of criticism (see The Modern Critical Spectrum, eds. Gerald Jay and Nancy Marmer Goldberg [Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1962], p. 1).

²³⁴ Morawski, p. 303.

The important concept for Marx is that forms develop historically in answer to man's needs in coming to terms with his situation. For example, Marx writes to Lassalle,

You have shown that the adoption of Roman law was originally (and, in so far as the scientific insight of jurists is concerned, is still) based on a misunderstanding. But it does not therefore follow that law in its modern form--despite constant attempts of present-day jurists to reconstruct it on the basis of misconstruction of Roman law--is misunderstood Roman Law. Otherwise one could say that every achievement of a previous period which is adopted by a later period is the misunderstood old form. It is clear, for example, that the three unities, as the French dramatists under Louis XIV constructed them theoretically, were based on misunderstood Greek drama (and the writings of Aristotle as the leading exponent of classic Greek drama). On the other hand, it is equally clear that they understood the three unities in accordance with their own art needs. Hence they clung to this so-called "classical" drama long after Dacier and others had correctly interpreted Aristotle for them. Likewise, all modern constitutions are largely based on the misunderstood English Constitution, and they adopt as essential--for instance, a so-called responsible cabinet--a feature of the English Constitution which has fallen into decay and only formally exists in England today as a result of misuse. The misunderstood form is precisely the general form, and, at a certain stage of social development, the only one capable of general use.²³⁵

It is clear that Marx is saying that new forms develop out of an understanding (or misunderstanding) of old forms in response to emergent needs. New forms are inextricably bound up with old forms (which answered old situations) and new needs.

²³⁵ Karl Marx, "Letter to Ferdinand Lassalle [22 July 1861], "in Literature and Art, pp. 21-22.

Marx's and Engels' neglect of the strictly formal elements in their literary observations constitutes the weakest element in their criticism. Morawski sums up the problem,

For them, form is the ensemble of artistic means, or the requisite harmonious organization of elements within a total aesthetic structure. That they wrote little on problems of form is to be explained only in part by Engels' letter to Mehring (1893), in which he declared they had been 'bound' first to lay the main emphasis on content. Marx's and Engels' discussion of Sickingen, in fact, shows them committed to Gehaltsthetik [i.e., the inner, intellectual content or doctrine of a literary work] priorities--which we may stress again, in no way contradicts their view that the realized artwork is an autotelic structure. For both men, style consisted of the individual quality of an artwork. This observation they did not elaborate on in respect to the general discussion of the nature of art.²³⁶

In previous discussion it has been shown that Marx's and Engels' concept of style can be developed from their overall views. On the other hand, the fact that Marx and Engels do not relate specific formal elements in the literary work to specific forms of human praxis creates a major obstacle in creating a viable Marxist methodology.²³⁷ As I hope to demonstrate in subsequent discussion, the consequences of Marx's and Engels' bias has been enormous for Marxist criticism as a whole. Specifically, it has

²³⁶Morawski, p. 306.

²³⁷At times Marx hints at the possibility of making the connection: for example when he discusses the "tragedy" of the Reformation and the Peasant's War in relation to Lassalle's dramatic tragedy, he seems to be saying this.

entailed two major problems: first, it leads to an emphasis on content as distinct from form, a stress on "what is said" rather than "how it is said." Second, with its emphasis on content to the neglect of form, it is practically impossible to relate the structure of a literary work to its function, to what it does for the artist or the audience.

Purpose and Function
in the Symbolic Act

In a preceding section of this paper, I have discussed the purpose and function of the creative act, i.e., what the creative act does for the artist. Moreover, in the sense that the artist is also an audience (he reads and criticizes his own work), what has been said about the purpose and function of the creative act holds true for the general audience as well as the individual artist, depending on the extent to which their situations overlap. The artist is not a different species; many of the situations he confronts are common problems which differ only in specific details from those every man encounters. Kenneth Burke argues,

The researches of anthropologists indicate that man has "progressed" in cultural cycles which repeat themselves in essence (in form) despite the limitless variety of specific details to embody such essences or forms. Speech, material traits (for instance, tools), art, mythology, religion, social systems, property, government, and war-- these are the nine "potentials" which man continually re-individuates into specific cultural channels, and which anthropologists call the "universal

pattern." . . . And while these potentialities are continually changing their external aspects, their "individuations," they do not change in essence.²³⁸

In order to experience these "universal patterns" emotionally, we must express them, individuate them in some specific form; unless we do this we cannot deal with them on a conscious level or understand what they mean (either emotionally or intellectually). All men must do this; what distinguishes the artist is not his expression of emotion, but the making available of his expression in a public form which can evoke that experience in others.²³⁹ Moreover, meanings imply attitudes and attitudes are incipient acts (i.e., what something means to you will determine how you act toward it).

This section, then, will deal with the way in which Marx and Engels analyze works of art as they become public and become part of man's culture, as they constitute one of the many symbolic systems which enter into praxis. The focus here will be on the specific social function of literature as a form of ideology which man uses in action as "a specific form of social consciousness,"

²³⁸ Kenneth Burke, Counter-Statement, p. 48.

²³⁹ For example, from Marx's point of view the state of alienation is the characteristic condition of man in bourgeois society; we are all alienated, but Camus's (to take a modern instance) great distinction is the creation of forms by which the meaning of alienation is expressed and its emotional structure evoked and experienced.

and as "a conductor of attitudes toward radical social change"²⁴⁰ (or perpetuating the status quo).

The description of art as "a form of ideology" is not entirely correct. As I have attempted to demonstrate, from Marx's point of view, art serves a variety of functions--the objectification of man's being, the exploration of the possibilities of human action, the aesthetic experience in consummation, social identification, etc.--; it is only as art functions as a mode of legitimation of a particular class or group that it also functions as an ideology, for it is the function of ideologies to legitimate authority and its exercise of power. Lefebvre explains it this way:

Every society, every authority has to be accepted. A given social structure with its specific social and juridical relations, must obtain the consensus of the majority, if not the totality of its members. No social group, no constituted society is possible without such adherence, and sociologists are justified in stressing this consensus. But how is this consensus arrived at? How do conquerors, rulers, masters, those in power make oppression acceptable? Marx and Engels have repeatedly emphasized the fact that no society is based on sheer brute force alone. Every social form finds its rationale in the society's growth and development, in the level its productive forces have attained. It is the role of ideologies to secure the assent of the oppressed and exploited. Ideologies represent the latter to themselves in such a way as to wrest from them, in addition to material wealth, their "spiritual" acceptance of this situation, even their support. Class ideologies create three images of the class that is struggling for

²⁴⁰Morawski, p. 304.

dominance: an image for itself; an image of itself for other classes, which exalts it; an image of itself for other classes, which devalues them in their own eyes, drags them down, tries to defeat them, so to speak, without a shot being fired. Thus the feudal nobility put forward an image of itself-- a multiple image with multiple facets; the knight, the nobleman, the lord. Similarly, the middle class elaborated an image of itself for its own use: as the bearer of human reason in history, as uniquely endowed with good and honorable intentions, finally as alone possessed with a capacity for efficient organization. It also has its own images of other classes: the good worker, the bad worker, the agitator, the rabble rouser. Lastly it puts forward a self image for the use of other classes: how its money serves the general good, promotes human happiness, how the middle-class organization of society promotes population growth and material progress.²⁴¹

Thus, in The German Ideology, Marx and Engels write,

The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas; i.e. the class, which is the ruling class material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it. The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships, the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas; hence of relationships which make the one class the ruling one, therefore the ideas of its dominance. The individuals composing the ruling class possess among other things consciousness, and therefore think. In so far, therefore, as they rule as a class and determine the extent and compass of an epoch, it is self-evident that they do this in their whole range, hence among other things, rule also as thinkers, as producers of ideas, and regulate the production and distribution of the ideas of their age: thus their ideas are the ruling ideas of the epoch. For instance in an age and in a

²⁴¹Lefebvre, pp. 75-77.

country where royal power, aristocracy and bourgeoisie are contending for mastery and where, therefore, mastery is shared, the doctrine of the separation of powers proves to be the dominant idea and is expressed as an "eternal law." The division of labour, which we saw above as one of the chief forces of history up till now, manifests itself also in the ruling class as the division of mental and material labour, so that inside this class one part appears as the thinkers of the class (its active, conceptive ideologists, who make the perfecting of the illusion of the class about itself their chief source of livelihood), while the other's attitude to these ideas and illusions is more passive and receptive, because they are in reality the active members of this class and have less time to make up illusions and ideas about themselves. . . . each new class which puts itself in the place of one ruling before it, is compelled merely in order to carry through its aim, to represent its interest as the common interest of all the members of society, put in ideal form; it will give its ideas the form of universality, and represent them as the only rational universally valid one.²⁴²

Culture itself may become a mode of domination. Norman Birnbaum argues: "Industrial culture rests on the industrialization of culture. A system of symbols, of consciousness, of sensibility, of preconscious and unconscious meanings, has been assimilated to the imperatives of machine production, market organization, and bureaucratic power."²⁴³ On the other hand, although ideologies tend to attain universality in the perfection and all inclusiveness of a system (by becoming inextricably interwoven with other powerful symbols, e.g., God,

²⁴²The German Ideology, pp. 39-41.

²⁴³Norman Birnbaum, The Crisis of Industrial Society (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 113.

Nature, Reason, etc.), they never attain absolute dominance and stability. They must struggle against other ideologies, and Lefebvre declares, "No form of consciousness ever constitutes a last, last word, no ideology ever manages to transform itself into a permanent system. Why? Because praxis always looks forward to new possibilities, a future different from the present."²⁴⁴

Moreover, insofar as art examines the possibilities of human action, insofar as it depicts new possibilities, it subverts the prevailing ideology. This notion that art (and the artist) can to some degree transcend its ideological structure is implicit in Marx's and Engels' comments on Balzac and their concept of realism ("truthful reproduction of typical characters under typical circumstances"). In criticizing Lassalle's play, Marx's and Engels' insistence on less Schiller and more Shakespeare, on individuality and specificity, makes it clear that their conception of realism includes not only the ability of the work to express the dominant and typical elements struggling in a particular historical period but, simultaneously, to depict fresh, "living" characters and unique actions consistent with those characters.

²⁴⁴Lefebvre, pp. 75-77.

Implicit in Marxism's dialectical method is the necessity of depicting not only what is (thesis) and what is not (antithesis), but of "going beyond" (synthesis). Aeschylus, Shakespeare, and Goethe not only depict their existing social reality (thesis) and its contradictions (antithesis), but their works go beyond both to depict something of the universal patterns in man's existence. This is also true of Balzac, who was able to triumph in spite of ideology. Engels writes,

That Balzac was thus compelled to go against his own class sympathies and political prejudices, that he saw the necessity of the downfall of his favorite nobles and described them as people deserving no better fate; that he saw the real men of the future where, for the time being, they alone were to be found--that I consider one of the greatest features in old Balzac.²⁴⁵

For Marx and Engels, "realism is the artistic-cognitive value of an artwork," but, as Morawski argues,

Their comments on Balzac demonstrate that the definition of the cognitive equivalent is broader than that of the ideological (which we have seen to be class situated). Thus while an artist's realist tendency will manifest his attitude toward contemporary class strife, a direct correlation of the artistic-cognitive values and the socio-political or philosophical opinions of the artist does not necessarily obtain. Balzac was a professed and quite sincere Royalist; nonetheless his cycle of novels constitutes an indictment of Royalist doctrine. Marx and Engels examined the cognitive equivalent of an art work for the range and scope of its historical perspective.²⁴⁶

²⁴⁵Engels, "Letter to Margaret Harkness [April, 1888]," in Literature and Art, p. 43.

²⁴⁶Morawski, p. 309.

Morawski rightly stresses the cognitive element in Marx's and Engels' criticism, but it is necessary to recall Marx's objections to the tendency to dissolve art in cognition: "'Man asserts himself in the world not only by means of thought, but also through his senses. . . .'"²⁴⁷ According to Lifschitz, for Marx, "the transition from Idealism to Materialism is inevitably bound up with the emancipation of art as a sense activity from abstract thought."²⁴⁸

Does this mean that art has no function in the ideological battles which rage within any given historical period? Certainly not; since art is intimately involved with the ways in which man comes to grips with his particular situation, it is, by its very nature, selective and biased. As Engels writes to Minna Kautsky: "I am not at all an opponent of tendentious [biased] poetry as such. . . . But I think that the bias should flow by itself from the situation and action, without particular indications, and that the writer is not obliged to obtrude on the reader the future historical solutions of the social conflicts pictured."²⁴⁹ Marx says that it is in

²⁴⁷Mikhail Lifschitz, "Marx on Aesthetics," International Literature, 2 (1933), 85.

²⁴⁸Lifschitz, loc. cit.

²⁴⁹Frederick Engels, "Letter to Minna Kautsky [26 November 1885]," Literature and Art, p. 45.

the "ideological forms--law, politics, religion, art, etc.--" that men become conscious of the contradictions and conflicts in the social order, and it is in these forms that men "fight it out."²⁵⁰ Although neither Marx nor Engels describe the process or the method by which it is carried out, their criticism seems to indicate that they see the specific social function of art, as it is practiced by the majority of artists, as the creation and maintenance of social hierarchies through the legitimation of various powers (which may or may not be in accord with the present ideology).

Moreover, since Marx and Engels believe that art enters into praxis and affects the way men act, they are extremely interested in how accurately a writer sizes up a particular historical situation. Their criticism of Eugene Sue's novel, Les mysteres de Paris (1842-43) and of most works generally is not based on whether or not the writers are biased, but rather to what degree they avoid mere superficialities and surface details. Their criticism of Sue's novel and of Naturalism is based on their belief that these works do not go beyond the description of surface phenomena; since these writers are unable to transcend their particular historical situation by relating their observations of society to some coherent

²⁵⁰ Karl Marx, Critique of Political Economy, p. 21.

theory of the historical development of society, their vision is necessarily limited. From Marx's and Engels' point of view, art should examine in as much depth as possible the dynamic character of reality which is a consequence of man's praxis. This involves not only a conception of the past and the present but of a possible future (not explicit, but implicit in the work itself, deriving from the action). Action, character, scene, agency, and goal are all dynamic categories in the process of becoming; man as a being of praxis, of creative action, changes nature and himself. Man is not only what he does but he is also "that which he is capable of becoming." Ernst Fischer explains,

We see him [i.e., man] as the inexhaustible possibility of a living creature, who, through work, commenced the attack upon nature and thus upon himself; who does not passively adapt himself to the surrounding world, but undertakes actively to adapt it to his needs and who, by satisfying these needs, multiplies and refines them until they are more than needs; who is not only the creature of the world which preceded him, but the creator of a new world, in his doing and his language, his imagination and his consciousness; who is not only 'an abyss of past things' but also a fullness of future ones; who is not closed within that which befits his species but is also open to the new, the far-away, the unknown, always confronted with alternatives, always called upon to make free decisions; who endlessly anticipates his works in his projects, and himself in his works; a living creature between totality and individuation, aggression and solidarity, death and potential immortality; a living creature driven forward and striding ahead, restless, incomplete, unrealized.²⁵¹

²⁵¹ Ernst Fischer, Art Against Ideology, trans. Anna Bostock (London: Penguin, 1969), pp. 214-15.

Only great art, produced by men who are not limited to a narrow ideology, can give us this picture of man.

The Nature of the Audience and Criticism

Other than what has already been noted, Marx and Engels made few references to the audience, the consumers of art; Marx and Engels were much more interested in production, the creative act, than they were in its consumption. Indeed, Marx believed, for the most part, that "production creates, produces consumption,"²⁵² and "gives consumption a distinct form, a character, a finish."²⁵³

Just as consumption puts the finishing touch on the product as a product, so production puts the finishing touch on the product as a product, so production puts the finishing touch to consumption. For one thing, the object is not simply an object in general, but a particular object which must be consumed in a particular way, a way determined by production. Hunger is hunger; but the hunger that is satisfied by cooked meat eaten with knife and fork differs from hunger that devours raw meat with the help of hands, nails and teeth. Production thus produces not only the object of consumption but also the mode of consumption, not only objectively but also subjectively. Production therefore creates the consumer.²⁵⁴

Thus, the responsibility is on the artist, for the kind of work that he creates will determine to a large degree the way in which it is consumed. Moreover, production

²⁵²Karl Marx, Critique of Political Economy, p. 21.

²⁵³Karl Marx, loc. cit.

²⁵⁴Karl Marx, loc. cit.

itself creates needs:

Production not only provides the material to satisfy a need, but it also provides the need for the material. When consumption emerges from its original primitive crudeness and immediacy--and its remaining in that state would be due to the fact that production was still primitively crude--then it is itself as a desire brought about by the object. The need felt for the object is induced by the perception of the object.²⁵⁵

Marx adds, "An objet d'art creates a public that has artistic taste and is able to enjoy beauty--and the same can be said of any other product. Production accordingly produces not only an object for the subject, but also a subject for the object."²⁵⁶ In creating works of art, the artist also creates the consumer, a particular mode of consumption, and a need for the particular art work.

However, Marx does not mean that once the work is produced all men will appreciate it to the same degree. Although "man's musical sense is only awakened by music, the most beautiful music has no meaning for the non-musical ear."²⁵⁷ On the other hand, it is only through the production of music that man's potential for appreciating music is actualized. Marx explains,

It is only through the objectively deployed wealth of subjective human sensibility (a musical ear, an eye which is sensitive to the beauty of form, in short, senses which are capable of human satisfaction and which confirm themselves as human

²⁵⁵ Karl Marx, loc. cit.

²⁵⁶ Karl Marx, loc. cit.

²⁵⁷ Karl Marx, Early Writings, p. 161.

faculties) is cultivated or created. For it is not only the five senses, but also the so-called spiritual senses, the practical senses (desiring, loving, etc.) in brief, human sensibility and the human character of the senses, which can only come into being through the existence of its object, through humanized nature. The cultivation of the five senses is the work of all previous history.²⁵⁸

Ideally, in the process of creation the artist objectifies his "individuality" and his "true human and social nature."²⁵⁹ By the same token, under ideal conditions, Marx says, "In your satisfaction and your use of my product I would have had the direct and conscious satisfaction that my work satisfied a human need, that it objectified human nature, and that it created an object appropriate to the need of another human being. . . . I would have been the mediator between you and the species and you would have experienced me as a redintegration [sic] of your own nature and a necessary part of yourself; I would have been affirmed in your thought as well as your love. . . . In my individual life I would have directly created your life; . . ."²⁶⁰

At the same time, Marx argues that "a nation which aims to develop its culture more freely can no longer remain the slave of its material needs, the bondsman of its

²⁵⁸ Karl Marx, loc. cit.

²⁵⁹ Karl Marx, "From Excerpt Notes of 1344," Easton and Guddat, p. 281.

²⁶⁰ Karl Marx, loc. cit.

body. It needs above all leisure time in which to produce and to enjoy culture."²⁶¹ Man must be relatively free of material needs to enjoy art; "the needy man, burdened with cares, has no appreciation of the most beautiful spectacle."²⁶² Hence, from Marx's point of view, it is only the upper classes and the bourgeois who have access to art and culture, and, paradoxically, because they are the only ones who are exposed to great works of art, they are the only ones who could have developed a need for them and appreciation of them. In Capital, Marx vividly describes the degradation of the workers and the "degree of culture of these 'labour-powers.'"²⁶³ The incredible hours that the children are forced to work make it impossible for them to acquire even the semblance of culture. Even if they could take time off for some degree of education, the result would be minimal. In the production process itself, in the division of labor and manufacture, "whatever may have been its particular starting point, its final form is invariably the same--a productive mechanism whose parts are human beings . . . a labourer who all his life performs one and the same simple operation, converts his whole body into the automatic

²⁶¹Karl Marx, Early Writings, p. 79.

²⁶²Ibid., p. 162.

²⁶³Capital, I, p. 259.

specialized implement of that operation."²⁶⁴ Not only do the workers not have access to culture and art, but even if they did they could not appreciate it; they have been de-humanized by their mode of existence. In terms of an audience for literature, they are literally--physically and mentally--incapable of responding. At best, they have been bombarded with what has been called "popular" or "mass" culture, which conveys "crude versions of consensual ideologies," and which "has denied by implication the possibilities of realizing alternative social arrangements which would reverse or seriously alter the prevailing distribution of power," and which "above all . . . have mounted a savage attack on those powers of imagination and sensibility which alone could mobilize psychic energies for criticism or revolt. . . . Mass culture in this respect is an instrument of discipline."²⁶⁵

By the same token, while the bourgeois have access to works of art, they debase art by transforming it into a commodity, by treating it from a utilitarian standpoint, as a means to some other end (e.g., profit or legitimation of their power). As Morawski explains it,

The people most excluded from the values of art are the new urban working classes, who have neither the wages nor the leisure to gain access. At the same time individuality here and there gains new possibilities and "freedom" as all communal bonds

²⁶⁴ Ibid., pp. 338-39.

²⁶⁵ Birnbaum, pp. 135-36.

excepting the money nexus are broken down; some superior art is produced, but it bears the traces of its epoch and, moreover, is the prerogative of an elite, while for others there is but cheap and stupid trash and spectacle.²⁶⁶

From Marx's point of view, bourgeois society cannot possibly create a fit audience for art. Man's capacity for full aesthetic experience cannot be realized in a society that is based on exploitation and alienation. In order to create a fit audience, in order to re-integrate art back into society and restore the social role of the artist, it is necessary to create a new society founded on new social relationships, which, in turn, implies a new type of man.²⁶⁷

In response to works of art, all audiences participate in criticism. This section, however, will deal with criticism as it is conceived by Marx in the narrower sense, as a specific philosophical activity which includes literature as one of its objects of study. As in the first two sections of this study which focus on the creative act and the work of art itself. The emphasis will be on the role of the critic, the critical act, the method of criticism and, finally, the purpose of criticism.

With respect to the role of the critic, it should be mentioned at the start that while Marx and Engels

²⁶⁶ Morawski, p. 307.

²⁶⁷ Cf. Robert Tucker, Philosophy and Myth in Karl Marx and The Marxian Revolutionary Idea.

could have predicted--from their study of the division of labor in bourgeois society and its consequences in the fragmentation and alienation of man--the increasing narrowness and specialization, the widening split between writers and critics, they would have been adamantly opposed to this development. Just as with creative, artistic activity, critical activity should not be the exclusive sphere of one section of society; the "whole man" should be able to "criticize after dinner" without ever becoming a critic.²⁶⁸ Neither the writer nor the critic should become specialists; ideally, like the literary figures of antiquity, the Renaissance, and the Enlightenment, writers and critics are interested in all areas of life, including the political, the social, and the aesthetic.

In addition to being writer-critics (i.e., critics whose general approach to aesthetic problems is generated in his relationship with his own work), Marx and Engels were philosopher-critics (i.e., critics concerned with putting art in some sort of systematic relationship).²⁶⁹ Indeed, for them the activity of the philosopher and the activity of the critic are one and the same. Ideas, Marx says, "won by our intelligence, embodied in our outlook, and forged in our conscience are chains from which we cannot tear ourselves away without breaking our hearts,

²⁶⁸ The German Ideology, p. 22.

²⁶⁹ The two terms are borrowed from Georg Lukacs.

they are the demons we can overcome only by submitting to them."²⁷⁰ Without criticism and understanding, ideas (e.g., as ideologies) can dominate man. Marx sees man's ignorance as his "tragic fate," and he argues that "in the frightening dramas of the royal houses of Mycenae and Thebes the greatest Greek poets rightly represented ignorance as tragic fate."²⁷¹ Hence, the practice of philosophy is criticism, "which measures individual existence against essence, particular actuality against the Idea. . . ."²⁷² The role of the philosopher-critic is the "relentless criticism of all existing conditions," which has as its object the "reform of consciousness, not through dogmas, but through analysis of the mystical consciousness that is unclear about itself, whether in religion or politics."²⁷³ Just as Matthew Arnold insists that the critic "see things as they are," so Marx argues that "the whole object itself must be studied in its development; there must be no arbitrary classifications; the rationale of the thing itself must be disclosed in all

²⁷⁰ Karl Marx, "Communism and the Augsburg 'Allgemeine Zeitung,'" Easton and Guddat, p. 135.

²⁷¹ Karl Marx, "The Leading Article in No. 179 of the Kolnische Zeitung: Religion, Free Press, and Philosophy," Easton and Guddat, p. 130.

²⁷² Karl Marx, "Notes to the Doctoral Dissertation," Easton and Guddat, p. 62.

²⁷³ Karl Marx, "Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of the State (1843)," Easton and Guddat, pp. 213, 214.

its contradictoriness and find its unity in itself."²⁷⁴ Furthermore, because there is implicit in the dialectical method itself a movement toward totality, a striving to bring all things into relationship, it really makes no difference where one begins. "Thus," Marx says, "the criticism of heaven turns into the criticism of the earth, the criticism of religion into the criticism of law, and the criticism of theology into the criticism of politics."²⁷⁵ A criticism of society implies and leads to a criticism of art and vice versa."²⁷⁶ The critic's role is not distinguished from that of the philosopher, and the object of the philosopher's activity is the criticism of life, one element of which is art.²⁷⁷

At the same time, for Marx and Engels, "life" in all of its manifestations is a profoundly historical and dialectical phenomenon. They believe that all experience

²⁷⁴ Karl Marx, "Letter to His Father," Easton and Guddat, p. 43.

²⁷⁵ Karl Marx, "Toward the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law: Introduction (1843)," Easton and Guddat, p. 251.

²⁷⁶ Hegel's works stand as an example, par excellence, of this idea, and if Marx and Engels retained nothing else, they incorporated Hegel's dialectical method.

²⁷⁷ Marx's conception of the critic's role is surprisingly close to Northrop Frye's latest definition. In The Critical Path, Frye writes: "The modern critic is therefore a student of mythology, and his total subject embraces not merely literature, but the areas of concern which the mythical language of construction and belief enters and informs. These include large parts of religion, philosophy, political theory, and the social sciences" (p. 98).

is intrinsically temporal, and, for this reason, one could characterize their critical perspective under the rubric of historicism. What they had to say about the nature of the creative act is also applicable to the critical act. Like all praxis, understanding and criticism are historical acts and are related to a specific historical present. There are no "eternal categories" or unchanging objectively valid interpretations of anything. To assume so would imply that one could view a work of art from some standpoint outside of history. Frederick Jameson argues, ". . . what holds true for the form of the work of art itself also holds for the categories of literary criticism; they too are profoundly dependent on a situation of a changing and historical character. . . ." ²⁷⁸ Perception, understanding, criticism are not simply abstract thinking or "sensuous contemplation," but are intimately involved with man's "practical, human-sensuous activity." ²⁷⁹ Man cannot escape from history; history is man's actions. Meaning itself is historical and criticism stands in the situation in which the critic stands; every act of criticism is in a given context. Thus the critic interprets a text in the context of a particular situation in which he finds himself, which he defines in

²⁷⁸ Frederick Jameson, Marxism and Form, p. 355.

²⁷⁹ Karl Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach," Marx and Engels: Basic Writings, p. 244.

relation to past, present, and future, what he wants to achieve, what he believes the goals of criticism to be. Criticism, like artistic creation, is an act, is praxis; it is determined by the critic's image of the past, his consciousness of the present, and his relation to the future.

In addition, if criticism and understanding are essentially linguistic (and language, Marx argues is a "social product"²⁸⁰), then, they are subject to historical change. Moreover, language is "the element of thought itself."²⁸¹ It is the medium through which man encounters the world, and it structures and, to a great extent, determines what he can perceive and understand. As Heidegger argues, language "'already conceals within itself a developed mode of ideation,' an 'already shaped way of seeing.'"²⁸² As one critic explains it, an "objective, presuppositionless" criticism is impossible:

The hope of interpreting "without prejudice and presupposition" ultimately flies in the face of the way understanding operates. What appears from the "object" is what one allows to appear and what the thematization of the world at work in his understanding will bring to light. It is naive to assume that what is "really there" is "self-evident." The very definition of what is presumed to be self-evident rests on a body of unnoticed presuppositions which are present in every interpretative construction

²⁸⁰ Capital, I, p. 74.

²⁸¹ Karl Marx, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts," Easton and Guddat, p. 312.

²⁸² Cited in Richard Palmer, Hermeneutics, p. 135.

by the "objective" and "presuppositionless" interpreter. . . .

In literary interpretation, this means that the most "presuppositionless" interpreter of a text of lyric poetry has preliminary assumptions. Even as he approaches a text, he may already have seen it as a certain kind of text, say, a lyric, and is placing himself in the posture he interprets to be appropriate to such a text. His encounter with the work is not in some context outside time and space, outside his own horizon of experiences and interests, but rather in a particular time and place. There is, for instance, a reason he is turning to this text and not some other, and thus he approaches the text questioningly, not with a blank openness.²⁸³

As Marx says, philosophy (i.e., criticism) "does not stand outside the world anymore than man's brain is outside him because it is not in his stomach! . . ." ²⁸⁴

Given then the radical historicism of criticism, indeed of all understanding, what critical method can one adopt? The answer for Marx and the method which he adopted in all his works is the method of Hegel--the dialectical method. Hegel's Phenomenology, Marx asserts, contains "the critical elements--though still in an alienated form--":

The great thing in Hegel's Phenomenology and its final result--the dialectic of negativity as the moving and productive principle--is simply that Hegel grasps the self-development of man as a process, objectification as loss of the object, as alienation and transcendence of this alienation; that he thus grasps the nature of work and comprehends objective man, authentic because actual, as the result of his own work. . . . Hegel's positive

²⁸³ Ibid., p. 136.

²⁸⁴ Karl Marx, ". . . Religion, Free Press, and Philosophy," Easton and Guddat, p. 122.

achievement here (in his speculative logic) is his view that determinate concepts, universal fixed thought-forms independent of nature and spirit, are a necessary result of universal human nature human thought. Hegel has collated and presented them as moments of the abstraction process. For example, Being transcended is Essence, Essence transcended is Concept, Concept transcended . . . Absolute Idea. But what, then, is the Absolute Idea? It must again transcend its own self unless it wants to go through once more the beginning the whole movement of abstraction and remain content with being a collection of abstractions or a self-comprehending abstraction.²⁸⁵

Marx adopted Hegel's dialectical method in his own work. It is not in the scope of this paper to go into the details of the dialectical method or the ways in which Marx modified it. Its dynamic qualities--the principle of negativity (antithesis) and transcendence (synthesis)--should be noted. Moreover, the dialectic is not simply an epistemological principle--a principle of knowing about knowing--but in addition an ontological principle--a principle of knowing about being. It is simultaneously a method of knowing and a dynamic process in the object known.

In the "Afterword" to the Second German Edition of Capital, Marx writes:

My dialectical method is not only different from the Hegelian, but is its direct opposite. To Hegel, the life-process of the human brain, i.e. the process of thinking, which, under the name of "the Idea" he even transforms into an independent

²⁸⁵ Karl Marx, "Feuerbachian Criticism of Hegel," Easton and Guddat, pp. 321, 333.

subject, is the demiurgos of the real world, and the real world is only the external, phenomenal form of "the Idea." With me, on the contrary, the ideal is nothing else than the material world reflected by the human mind, and translated into forms of thought. . . . The mystification which the dialectic suffers at Hegel's hands by no means prevents him from being the first to present its general form of working in a comprehensive and conscious manner. With him it is standing on its head. It must be turned right side up again, if you would discover the rational kernel within the mystical shell.

In its mystified form, dialectic became the fashion in Germany, because it seemed to transfigure and to glorify the existing state of things. In its rational form it is a scandal and abomination to bourgeoisie and its doctrinaire professors, because it includes in its comprehension an affirmative recognition of the existing state of things, at the same time also, the recognition of the negation of that state, of its inevitable breaking up; because it regards every historically developed social form as in fluid movement, and therefore takes into account its transient nature not less than its momentary existence; because it lets nothing impose upon it, and is in its essence critical and revolutionary.²⁸⁶

While man cannot escape history, at least he can become conscious of it. The dialectical method forces him to be self-conscious, not only of the transient nature of forms, but of his own place in history. It directs him not only to think (he does not need it for this), but to think about his thoughts. In his chapter on dialectical criticism, Jameson sums up the major elements of Hegelian and Marxian dialectic:

Thus dialectical thought is in its very structure self-consciousness and may be described as the

²⁸⁶ Capital, I, pp. 19-20.

attempt to think about a given object on one level and at the same time to observe your own thought processes as we do so: or to use a more scientific figure, to reckon the position of the observer into the experiment itself. In this light, the difference between the Hegelian and the Marxist dialectics can be defined in terms of the type of self-consciousness involved. For Hegel this is a relatively logical one, and involves a sense of the interrelationship of such purely intellectual categories as subject and object, quality and quantity, limitation and infinity, and so forth: here the thinker comes to understand the way in which his own determinate thought processes, and indeed the very forms of the problems from which he sets forth, limit the results of his thinking. For the Marxist dialectic, on the other hand, the self-consciousness aimed at is the awareness of the thinker's position in society and in history itself, and of the limits imposed on this awareness by his class position--in short of the ideological and situational nature of all thought and of the initial invention of the problems themselves. Thus, it is clear that these two forms of the dialectic in no way contradict each other, even though their precise relationship remains to be worked out.²⁸⁷

Moreover, if literature is, as we have argued, a symbolic act by which man tries to come to terms with his situation, i.e., an answer to the situation in which it arose, then the dialectical method of criticism leads the critic not only to examine the "answer" but the "question" as well. The critic must not only see the object as it really is but he must see what it is not and transcend it in order to grasp the situation out of which it arose. Marx writes,

²⁸⁷ Jameson, p. 340. For what seems to me to be the best attempt so far, see Karl Mannheim, Essays on Sociology and Social Philosophy (1953) and Ideology and Utopia (1929).

True criticism, therefore, does not analyze the answers but the question. Just as the solution of an algebraic equation is found the moment the problem is put in its purest and sharpest form, any question is answered the moment it has become an actual question. World history itself has only one method; to answer and settle old questions through new ones. The verbal puzzles of any given period, therefore, are easily found. They are the questions of the day, and if the intention and the insight of each individual play an important role in the answers, if a sharp view is necessary to separate what belongs to the individual and what to the period, the questions, on the other hand, are open, ruthless voices of a period, transcending all individualities. They are its mottoes, the supremely practical proclamations of its psychic state. Hence in any period, reactionaries are good barometers for its condition, just as dogs are good for scenting something out.²⁸⁸

Translating this into a dialectical method of literary criticism, Jameson writes,

For the degree to which it [i.e., the dialectical method] places the older mental operation or problem-solving in a new and larger context, it converts the problem itself into a solution, no longer attempting to solve the dilemma head on, according to its own terms, but rather coming to understand the dilemma itself as the mark of the profound contradictions latent in the very mode of posing the problem. Thus, faced with obscure poetry, the naive reader attempts to at once interpret, to resolve the immediate difficulties back into the transparency of rational thought; whereas for a dialectically trained reader, it is the obscurity itself which is the object of his reading and its specific quality and structure that which he attempts to define and to compare with other forms of verbal opacity. Thus our thought no longer takes official problems at face value, but walks behind the screen to assess the very origin of the subject-object relationship in the first place. But this type of self-consciousness, which phenomenology defined as the epoche or the putting between

²⁸⁸ Karl Marx, "The Centralization Question [1842]," Easton and Guddat, p. 107.

parenthesis, receives its own dialectical evaluation through its place in the historical process.²⁸⁹

This dialectical movement of discovering the actual nature of conditions (thesis), of going beyond (antithesis), and of formulating a position that will transcend and include both (transcendence, synthesis) is characteristic of all of Marx's and Engels' writings. Both Marx and Engels were convinced of the validity of the method: however, they did warn against it being applied in an unthinking, mechanical fashion. Defending Ibsen's dramas against the charge of Philistinism made by Paul Ernst, a German critic and exponent of economic determinism, Engels warned Ernst about degrading the critical method into inflexible dogma: "I must first of all say that the materialist method is turned into its opposite when used, not as a guideline in historical investigation, but as a ready made pattern on which to tailor historical facts."²⁹⁰

On the other hand, without the dialectical method, with its movement of negation and transcendence (dialienation), thought and action lose their revolutionary character and become, as Herbert Marcuse says, "one-dimensional."²⁹¹ For Marx, the ultimate purpose of

²⁸⁹Jameson, p. 341.

²⁹⁰Frederick Engels, "Letter to Paul Ernst [5 June 1890]," Literature and Art, p. 57.

²⁹¹Cf. Herbert Marcuse, One Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society (1964); see also his study of the dialectic in Hegel and Marx in Reason and Revolution: Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory (1941).

criticism is not to become a more and more specialized activity or an esoteric system but to become "worldly," to become "the philosophy of the present world." The measure of its importance is the introduction of critical philosophy into "drawing rooms and priests' studies, into editorial offices of newspapers and the antechambers of courts, into the hatred and love of the people of the time."²⁹² Criticism cannot avoid the historical struggles of man; it is becoming "secularized." Thus Marx argues,

Philosophy has become secularized, and the most striking proof for this is the fact that the philosophical consciousness itself is drawn into the torment of struggle, not only outwardly but inwardly as well. Even though the construction of the future and its completion for all times is not our task, what we have to accomplish at this time is all the more clear: relentless criticism of all existing conditions, relentless in the sense that the criticism is not afraid of its findings and just as little afraid of the conflict with the powers that be. . . . And the entire socialistic principle, in turn, is only one side of the reality of true human nature. We have to be concerned just as much with the other side, the theoretical life of man. Hence we have to make religion, science, etc., the object of our criticism. . . . Reason has always existed, but not always in rational form. The critic, therefore, can start with any form of theoretical and practical consciousness and develop the true actuality out of the forms inherent in existing actuality as its ought-to-be goal.²⁹³

²⁹² Karl Marx, ". . . Religion, Free Press, and Philosophy," Easton and Guddat, p. 123.

²⁹³ Karl Marx, "Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of the State," Easton and Guddat, p. 213.

Marx starts with religion first because, from his point of view, religion sanctions the separation of man from himself, the split between the sacred and the profane, between supernatural and nature; it is the paradigm of man's alienation. Furthermore, criticism can become a "material force once it has gripped the masses," and the "criticism of religion ends with the doctrine that man is the highest being for man, hence with the categorical imperative to overthrow all conditions in which man is a degraded, enslaved, neglected, contemptible being-- . . ." ²⁹⁴ Criticism's avowed purpose is revolutionary: its revolutionary impulse comes from its "power of negative thinking," and its drive toward synthesis, as a reunification of praxis and an overcoming of man's alienation.

Ultimately, both Marx and Engels judge literature and literary criticism in terms of their content--their truth to "reality" (i.e., Marx's and Engels' conception of reality)--and their revolutionary function, the unmasking of the ideological forms of man's alienation. It has been noted that "truth to reality" in art signified a dramatic structure and the concept of typicality. This is what Marx and Engels mean by "realism," a term whose definition by subsequent interpreters has determined the

²⁹⁴Karl Marx, "Toward the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law," Easton and Guddat, p. 528.

course of Marxist criticism. This emphasis has had unfortunate consequences, as Professor Morawski argues,

But while it [realism] has often and most regrettably been taken as the fundamental and virtually sole principle of Marxist aesthetics, lacunae are evident. For example, Marx and Engels did not state whether in their view, optimally, typical characters always must be set in typical circumstances [e.g., Aeschylus' and Shakespeare's characters], and whether such circumstances always should entail typical characters. Nor did Marx and Engels affirm in every case direction of the typical patterns of reality in its social dynamism should include the socially emergent elements in decay might be adequate.²⁹⁵

To the extent that literature deals with the possibilities of human action, it is by its very nature revolutionary. Through man's imagination in the symbolic phase of action, literature is not only functional in providing various strategies for coping with his past and present situation, but it is also able to transcend the present and depict a different world of different meanings and new modes of human action.

This does not call for propaganda, at least as this word is understood in the negative sense. All great works of literature are biased ("tendentious"), but not all biased works are great works of art. The writer's sole charge is to capture the inherent dialectics of social reality in all its complexity and drama. Once the writer has the courage to do this, his work will be

²⁹⁵ Morawski, p. 309.

implicitly revolutionary. No matter what the manifest content, the latent content will be revolutionary. To see things as they are is revolutionary. For example, Marx praises the English Victorian novelists--Dickens, Thackeray, Charlotte Bronte, and Mrs. Gaskell--"whose eloquent and graphic portrayal of the world have revealed more political and social truths than all the professional politicians, publicists, and moralists put together. . . ." ²⁹⁶ A great writer, no matter what his class and political persuasion, by objectifying his own experience is able to communicate the truth about man and his social relationships. As this "truth" enters the consciousness of the writer and his audience, it changes meanings, emotions and attitudes, and, hence, is potentially revolutionary. To expose the contradictions in society and man's alienation is "the categorical imperative" to overcome these contradictions and thereby bring man back into unity with nature, other men, and himself.

By the same token, just as the writer attempts to come to terms with his situation, his social reality, through his symbolic acts (by naming the elements and structure of the situation, and thereby creating and communicating attitudes toward it), so the critic tries to

²⁹⁶ Karl Marx, "The English Middle Class," in the New York Tribune (1 August 1854), cited in Literature and Art, p. 133.

deal with the writer's solution through a symbolic act of his own (criticism), directed at revealing the work's complexity of structures and meanings as strategic answers to the situation in which the work arose. At the same time, the dialectical critic must be conscious of his own place in the historical process and how the work functions in his situation. He must go beyond the text to discover what the work does not say as well as what it says. He must examine the work's ideological thrust, what authorities are being legitimated, what terms for order are being employed, and whether these terms are relevant for his particular situation as well as the writer's.

Because Marx and Engels believe that ideas do not determine social relations but are derived from them, the Marxist critic is obliged to demonstrate how language, as it is employed by ordinary persons, by class ideologists, and by writers, is grounded in specific historical situations. Hence the dialectical movement is from the symbolic to the "scientific," that is, the non-symbolic levels of experience. By employing the dialectic, Marx and Engels are able to create a method for analyzing the way in which the ideas of the ruling class are depicted in philosophy, religion, and literature. For example, Marx and Engels, in The German Ideology, demonstrate how bourgeois "mystification" and "illusions" are a result

of the capability of symbols to endow things and relationships with the glory of the ruling class, which they represent. The dialectical method forces the critic to continually widen his scope, creating a general movement from the internal to the external, from the manifest surface to an underlying reality, from the superstructure to the material base, from the past to the present to the future, from the part to the whole, etc.

Whether one considers his method the method of literary analysis or simply one method among many, seems to me a matter of personal choice (Marx would argue that personal choice is intimately bound up in one's class position). Marxism, however, is, in a very real way, among the most viable methods of analysis. Professor Jameson explains it in this way:

In the long run, however, there is no need to justify the socio-economic "translation" which Marxism sees as the ultimate explanatory code for literary and cultural phenomena. Such justification is already implicit in the dialectical notion of the relationship between form and content. . . . For the essential characteristic of literary raw material or latent content is precisely that it never really is initially formless, never (unlike the unshaped substances of the other arts) initially contingent, but is rather already meaningful from the outset, being neither more or less than the very components of our concrete social life itself: words, thoughts, objects, desires, people, places, activities. The work of art does not confer meaning on these elements, but rather transforms their initial meanings into some new and heightened constructions of meanings; for that very reason neither the creation nor the interpretation of the work can ever be an arbitrary process.²⁹⁷

²⁹⁷ Jameson, pp. 402-03.

All methods are at the same time interpretations. A method cannot reveal any absolute "truth"; at best, it can only render fully what is already implicit in the method itself.

In this chapter I have attempted to give an indication of the importance which art had for Marx and Engels. In addition, I am arguing that the value of Marxism lies not so much in what Marx and Engels actually accomplished in their literary criticism but in what is available to the literary critic in Marxism as a world view. In their basic assumptions and their dialectical method, Marx and Engels offer a coherent and viable theory and methodology for constructing a sociology of literature. To be sure, although they make some interesting observations about actual literary works, which demonstrate a substantial degree of insight, their importance must rest on what is implicit in their philosophy for literary criticism rather than on their literary pronouncements as such. Part of the reason for this, it seems to me, is the lack of any thoroughgoing and developed work of criticism by these founders of communist thought; what is available is simply too sketchy and fragmented. More importantly, however, because they focus on the cognitive elements in the literary work to the neglect of form, there is a certain degree of inconsistency in their criticism as a whole. There is no question that Marx

and Engels are interested in the relationship between literature and social action. At the same time, they fail to articulate fully the relationship between the function of the work of art and its structure or the relationship of the structure and function of the work to the structure and function of social action. At times they come close to making the necessary connections; for example, Marx in the 18th Brumaire discusses social action as an art form (tragedy, comedy, and farce) and the way in which the bourgeois drew on Roman art forms during the French Revolution and the way in which these art forms were used to organize action. But neither Marx nor Engels attempt to relate the form and structure of literary works to the form and structure of praxis. Although they emphasize praxis, they say a good deal about its function but very little about its structure. The consequence of this lack of development is their inability to relate and differentiate the cognitive function of art from that of other symbolic systems: for example, how does the cognitive function of art differ from that of science? At the same time, praxis is more than cognition. From their perspective, the question is now how man uses literature to "know," but how he uses it to "act."

Furthermore, even if literature is a reflection of society, Marx and Engels developed no method of dealing with the symbolic nature of this reflection. Whatever

may be the underlying basis of ideology and art, both are still expressed in the symbolic systems, and Marx and Engels do not furnish a method for dealing with symbolic data as such. Of course, this does not mean that a method for dealing with symbolic forms cannot be developed as part of a Marxist world view; Marx and Engels simply do not attempt it. However, the necessity for doing so is implicit in the dialectical method itself. If content determines form, then what determines content? It is in the nature of the dialectical method to relate both. Practical action and symbolic action not only have content but structure, form as well as content. It is necessary to understand the form of social action and symbolic action as well as their content. And if social action is the "content" of the work of art, how can it escape the effect of the "form" in which it is expressed?

If consciousness determines action and language is consciousness, then it is necessary to develop a method for dealing with language as it is manifest in communication and, more specifically, literature. What is needed is a method for dealing with the structure of symbolic action both as a social act and as a symbolic act. For example, if it is true--and Marx thinks it is--that men become conscious of the contradictions in society through various ideological forms, and if it is in these forms that they "fight out" these contradictions, then it is

necessary to demonstrate not only how these forms function but how the struggle takes place in the structure and content of the forms themselves.

Marx and Engels conceive man as a creature of praxis, the basic structure of which is dramatic. The task of the Marxist critic is to demonstrate how the symbolic forms of literature are used to organize this action. Action must take place in some form, and if this form is dramatic, what better source of dramatic forms is there than literature? Scientific models, based on perception and cognition, do not furnish the forms of action; they provide forms of knowledge about the physical universe. They cannot depict the form, meaning, and function of the roles man must assume in society nor even the goals he must internalize in order to act at all. Art, particularly literature, is the primary source of dramatic models of action.

To the extent that Marx and Engels do not focus on these problems, the usefulness of Marxism as a method of literary criticism is limited. There is no reason to believe that the development of a fully worked out theory of the relationship between symbols and society would be inconsistent with Marxism. (The groundwork for such a theory will be discussed in the final section of this paper.) On the other hand, it must be recognized that these problems have been largely ignored by most Marxist critics.

CHAPTER III

WILLIAM MORRIS' MARXISM: TOWARD A GENERAL THEORY CONCERNING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ART AND SOCIETY

Karl Marx died in 1883; in that same year William Morris read Marx's Capital in the French, announced his acceptance of Socialism, and joined H. M. Hyndman's Social Democratic Federation. Morris' spiritual father, John Ruskin, who had once called himself a Communist, sent Morris a letter of encouragement, adding that he was unable to give anything but moral support because "'my timbers are enough shivered already.'"¹ The letter is significant; it documents, as Marx would say, a "nodal point" in the history of aesthetics and points to a new direction. With his original theories--taken from Carlyle and Ruskin--being tested and matured through fifteen years of practical experience as an artist, designer, and manufacturer, Morris became an active Marxian socialist. By 1883 Morris had rejected Carlyle's doctrine of work (work as an absolute good) for Ruskin's, but he had also progressed much further than Ruskin's elementary criticism of capitalist society; by this time the major

¹Cited in Egbert, Social Radicalism and the Arts, p. 424.

figure in his socialist ideas was Karl Marx. To go from Ruskin's theories to those of Morris is to experience a "quantum leap" in English aesthetics.

Ruskin's life and work may be interpreted as the culmination of a tradition, of an approach to art in terms of its social context and an argument for its social responsibility, that began with the early Romantics. His attempt to make the imagination into the highest cognitive faculty, his concept of the artist's high calling, his use of aesthetic metaphors and artistic criteria to judge Victorian culture--organic vs. mechanical, culture vs. civilization, unity vs. fragmentation, spiritual vs. material, etc.--all belong to a tradition which has its origins at least as far back as the late eighteenth century and which is embodied in such figures as Blake, Coleridge, Shelley, Carlyle, Dickens, and Arnold. As Raymond Williams argues so brilliantly, it is a tradition that includes practically every major intellectual and man of letters in nineteenth century England.²

By the middle and late 1880's, the Aesthetic Movement, with its "art for art's sake" doctrine, was fairly well established. In his Ten O'Clock Lecture of 1888, Whistler could argue that art is "selfishly occupied with her own perfection only--having no desire to

²Cf. Raymond Williams, Culture and Society 1780-1950 (New York: Harper and Row, 1958), pp. 3-158.

teach--seeking and finding the beautiful in all conditions and in all times."³ And by 1890 Oscar Wilde, in his Preface to Dorian Gray, was able to say in all seriousness that "all art is quite useless."⁴ This is not to imply that by 1890 literary radicalism was dead. The literary critic as social critic is strongly entrenched in the history of English intellectual history, and he is functioning today. Even the Aesthetic Movement can be seen as a protest against the dominant culture of late Victorian society. However, as early as Keats, one can see that "art was no longer conceived, as by Shelley, as an agent in man's struggle to master nature and discover himself. Art . . . was conceived as a compensation for life."⁵

This tendency to see art as divorced from everyday experience is found not only in the criticism of poetry, where it received its most extreme statements, but in the criticism of the novel. As the nineteenth

³Cited in William K. Wimsatt, Jr. and Cleanth Brooks, Literary Criticism: A Short History (New York: Knopf, 1957), p. 486.

⁴Oscar Wilde, The Picture of Dorian Gray (Cleveland, Ohio: World Publishing Co., 1946), p. 12. E. D. Le Mire, in "Morris' Reply to Whistler," The Journal of The William Morris Society, 1, No. 3 (Summer, 1963), 3-10, claims that Morris' lecture, "Of the Origins of Ornamental Art (1886)" was an answer to Whistler's Ten O'Clock lecture of February, 1885, and it is known that Morris offered financial assistance to Ruskin in his court battle against Whistler.

⁵Edward Palmer Thompson, William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1955), p. 44.

century wore on, critics of the novel began to see the "novelist's goal in transcendental terms, such as Beauty, or Truth, or Essence--words implying the familiar concept of an ideal world beyond the phenomena of life, but accessible to art."⁶ For example, one can see this in Thomas Hardy's views on fiction:

In spite of his insistence on verisimilitude--as seen in the rigorous time-charts, topographies and biographies of characters he always drew up for his novels, as well as his qualified approval for the naturalists' revolution against the artificial--fiction remained for him, like all art, something higher than life, 'more true, so to put it, than nature or history can be.'⁷

In addition, the emphasis on the novel's moral function "declined noticeably after 1880."⁸ Even with the influence of Continental realism and naturalism and the criteria of "truth to nature," there is the assumption that "mimesis must bow to a higher law, that the purpose of the novel is to give pleasure, and that the novelist must select his material, or transmute it, with this in mind."⁹ With few exceptions, most of the critical discussions of literature in the '80's and '90's moved toward the separation of art from everyday experience, toward endowing

⁶ Kenneth Graham, English Criticism of the Novel, 1865-1900 (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 38.

⁷ Ibid., p. 39.

⁸ Ibid., p. 5.

⁹ Ibid., p. 29.

the artist with some sort of special status, separated from the middle class world and middle class moralism, and a movement away from Shelley's conception of the artist as the "unacknowledged legislator of the world."

To a substantial degree, both Arnold and Ruskin are outside this literary movement, whose spokesmen enunciated doctrines which one is tempted to describe as the beginnings of modern literary criticism. Arnold, with his assertion that literature's goal is "a criticism of life" and his belief in the consoling and sustaining power of poetry where "religion and philosophy will be replaced by poetry,"¹⁰ grounds poetry, the function of poetry, in ordinary experience. Ruskin's equation of taste with morality--"the only morality"--, his belief that art is an expression of society, his insistence, in "The Nature of Gothic," that art is the expression of pleasure in work, his denunciation of the division of intellectual and manual labor, etc.--all tend to put art at the very center of man's everyday experiences. Both writers harken back to the tradition of Coleridge and Carlyle.

Coleridge, Carlyle, Mill, Ruskin, Arnold--all are insightful critics on the relationship between art and society. They are literary radicals in the best sense, combining and attempting to synthesize aesthetic and social concerns. William Morris is in this tradition.

¹⁰Wimsatt and Brooks, p. 448.

His major significance for literary criticism lies in his attempt to articulate a general theory of art which extends the tradition--the culmination of which is exemplified in the writings of Arnold and Ruskin--by incorporating it with Marxism. Morris attempts to attach the values involved in the tradition of the Romantic protest to an actual, objective growing social movement, the organized proletariat. The essential theoretical differences between Arnold Ruskin and Morris are summarized here by Raymond Williams:

. . . both Arnold and Ruskin are, in the end, victims of abstraction in their social criticism: Arnold, because he shirked extending his criticism of ideas to criticism of the social and economic system from which they proceeded; Ruskin, as becomes apparent in his proposals for reform, because he was committed to an idea of 'inherent design' as a model for society--a commitment which led him into a familiar type of general replanning of society on paper, without close attention to existing forces and institutions.

.
 The basic idea of 'organic form' produced in Ruskin's thinking about an ideal society, the familiar notion of a paternal State [i.e., like Coleridge's and Carlyle's]. He wished to see a rigid class-structure corresponding to his ideas of 'function.' It was the business of government, he argued, to produce, accumulate, and distribute real wealth, and to regulate and control its consumption. Government was to be guided in this by the principles of intrinsic value which became apparent in any right reading of the universal design. Democracy must be rejected: for its conception of the equality of men was not only untrue; it was also a disabling denial of order and 'function.' The ruling class must be the existing aristocracy, properly trained in its function.
 . . . Ruskin's definition of the three 'functional' orders of aristocracy corresponds exactly with that of Coleridge: first estate, landowners; second

estate, merchants and manufacturers; third estate, 'scholars and artists' (Coleridge's 'clersy').¹¹

Morris consciously distinguishes his position from that of Ruskin and Arnold. About Ruskin, he writes, ". . . he is not a Socialist, that is, not a practical one. He does not expect to see any general scheme even begun: he mingles with certain sound ideas which he seems to have acquired instinctively, a great deal of mere whims, . . . his idea of national workshops is one which could only be realized in a State (that is, a society) already socialized; nor could it ever take effect in the way that he thinks it could."¹² Moreover, Williams argues that Matthew Arnold is Morris' "principle opponent." Because "culture" is associated with Arnold, Morris usually treats it with contempt:

In the thirty years which I have known Oxford, more damage has been done to art (and therefore to literature) by Oxford "culture" than centuries of professors could repair--for, indeed, it is irreparable. These coarse brutalities of "light and leading" make education stink in the nostrils of thoughtful persons, and . . . are more likely than is Socialism to drive some of us mad. . . . I say that to attempt to teach literature with one hand while it destroys history with the other is a bewildering proceeding on the part of culture.¹³

¹¹Williams, p. 146.

¹²William Morris, "Letter to Robert Thompson (24 July 1884)," in Philip Henderson, ed., The Letters of William Morris: To His Family and Friends (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1950), pp. 204-05.

¹³Cited in Williams, p. 151.

When Morris uses the word culture, he usually uses it in opposition to civilization, which meant for him, as it did for Marx, bourgeois society. Morris had nothing but scorn for the "culture" that is the possession solely of Arnold's "saving remnant." If it is to have any significance, culture must become a way of life available for everyone, and, for Morris, as for Marx, this implies the necessity of a social revolution.

It is this incorporation of Marxian revolutionary Socialism into English literary radicalism, a tradition characterized by men who possess imaginations at once aesthetic and sociological, which constitutes William Morris' specific contribution to a general theory of art and literary criticism. Morris himself was quite conscious of his position; in "How I Became a Socialist" (1894), he writes,

To sum up, then, the study of history and the love and practice of art forced me into a hatred of the civilization which, if things were to stop as they are, would turn history into inconsequent nonsense, and make art a collection of the curiosities of the past which would have no serious relation to the life of the present.

But the consciousness of revolution stirring amidst our hateful modern society prevented me, luckier than many others of artistic perceptions, from crystallizing into a mere railer against "progress" [e.g., Carlyle] on the one hand, and on the other from wasting time and energy in any of the numerous schemes by which the quasi-artistic of the middle classes hope to make art grow when it has no longer any root [e.g., Ruskin's St. George Guild?], and thus I became a practical

Socialist.¹⁴

In what is now regarded as the definitive biography of Morris' road to revolutionary socialism, Edward Thompson writes,

William Morris was the first creative artist of major stature in the history of the world to take his stand, consciously and without shadow of compromise, with the revolutionary working class: to participate in the day-to-day work of building the Socialist movement: to put his brain and his genius at its disposal in the struggle.¹⁵

It is for this reason that Morris stands, as Raymond Williams describes him, as a "pivotal figure" in the tradition of literary radicalism. His casting his lot with revolutionary Socialism "was the most remarkable attempt that had so far been made to break the general deadlock" in the literary radicals' protests against nineteenth century culture and society.¹⁶

William Morris and Marxism

William Morris' place in the history of English Socialism, his relationship to Marxism, and his contribution to aesthetics continue to be controversial subjects. The only thing that can be said with any degree of certainty

¹⁴The Collected Works of William Morris, with Introduction by His Daughter, May Morris, 24 Vols. (London: Longman, Green and Co., 1914), XXIII, 280-81. Hereafter cited as Morris, Works.

¹⁵Edward Thompson, p. 841.

¹⁶Williams, pp. 161, 148.

is that in the last quarter century there has been a renewed interest in Morris' life and work. The various controversies surrounding Morris should surprise no one. In his own lifetime, particularly after his public announcement of his acceptance of Socialism, Morris was the object of vigorous partisan polemics. His joining of the Social Democratic Federation could not be ignored. His stature in English intellectual life--he was offered a poetry chair at Oxford in 1877 and was considered for the Laureateship after Tennyson's death in 1892--made it impossible for his contemporaries to overlook his socialist activities.

With his alliance with the Socialists, Morris' lectures and other activities became "news" for the English press and periodicals. In the "respectable" newspapers and journals of the day, there was an effort to "expel" Morris from middle class life. He was caricatured as an eccentric, an idealist, a dreamer.¹⁷ W. H. Mallock, the conservative "individualist," called William Morris' ideas "purely and simply a dream," and argued that "unless the something better [i.e., Morris' dream] is attainable, or is partially attainable, it would be far more desirable to form no ideal of it at all.

¹⁷Cf. Edward Thompson, pp. 354, 359, 369.

Mr. Morris and his school entirely forget this."¹⁸ As Edward Thompson observes, it is ironic that at the very time when Morris thought that he had found the "practical" solution to England's problems, he was labeled a "mis-guided idealist."¹⁹

Morris' critics and even some of his friends attempted to distinguish between Morris the reknowned poet and artist and Morris the Socialist. George Gissing, in his novel Demos (1886), caricatured Morris, making him a "dreamy idealist."²⁰ On the other hand, Morris' socialist friends considered him their most preeminent member. As one scholar argues,

The elation of the Democratic Federation over Morris' membership in it can well be imagined. Already his was a famous name both in poetry and in art. H. M. Hyndman testifies to the value of capable recruits to the new cause. Among their number they had some very able men, but Morris, with his great reputation and high character doubled their strength.²¹

S. G. Hobson, one of the members of the Federation at that time and a long time social radical, recalls that "William

¹⁸W. H. Mallock, "The Individualist Ideal: A Reply, I: Art," New Review, 21 (February, 1891), 102.

¹⁹Edward Thompson, p. 359.

²⁰John Goode, "Gissing, Morris, and English Socialism," Victorian Studies, 12, No. 2 (December, 1968), 220.

²¹Anna A. von Helmholtz-Phelan, The Social Philosophy of William Morris (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1927), p. 67.

Morris was the greatest amongst us."²² George Bernard Shaw writes in "Morris As I Knew Him," that "he was our one acknowledged Great Man; . . ."²³ Finally, five months after Morris' death, D. F. Hannigan wrote in the Westminster Review: "His writings in The Commonweal may be regarded as the gospel of English Socialism; . . ."²⁴

After his death, particularly from the beginning of this century until the middle thirties, Morris' reputation declined considerably, and his connections with the revolutionary Socialist movement and with Marxism were de-emphasized. In 1913 G. K. Chesterton wrote of Morris, "The importance of his Socialism can easily be exaggerated. Among other lesser points, he was not a Socialist; he was a sort of a Dickensian anarchist."²⁵ Perhaps Morris' reputation reached its lowest point in 1922 with Professor Scudder's estimate:

Nobody would dream of calling William Morris a thinker, yet he is something better than the most picturesque figure of the modern movement . . . The fascination of Morris' work is so great that

²²S. G. Hobson, Pilgrim to the Left: Memoirs of a Modern Revolutionist (London: Edward Arnold and Co., 1938), p. 73.

²³May Morris, William Morris: Artist, Writer, Socialist, 2 Vols. (1936; rpt. New York: Russell and Russell, 1936), II, x. Hereafter cited as May Morris, Works.

²⁴D. F. Hannigan, "William Morris, Poet and Revolutionist," Westminster Review, 147 (February, 1897), 119.

²⁵G. K. Chesterton, The Victorian Age in Literature (1913; rpt. London: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 89.

one forgets its lack of thought values; or rather, let us say that the mere spectacle of this winsome "dreamer of dreams, born out of this due time," driven by stress of events and emotions to "strive to put the crooked straight" by organizing socialist leagues and haranguing irreverent street audiences on political economy which he did not understand, is evidence of the irresistible impulse forcing the modern dreamer on to act, evidence all the stronger on account of the weakness of the dreamer's theories.

Anarchist and inveterate idealist, Morris is one with socialism on its critical side, but absurdly far from it in constructive ideas. His thought is in the main, literally de-moralized derivation from Ruskin.²⁶

There has been a continuous attempt to disassociate Morris from Marxian socialism, and this line of argument continues up to the present. D. C. Somervell, in his English Thought in the Nineteenth Century (1929) asserts that Morris' Socialism has "little grounding in economic doctrine; he was a socialist because--in sharp contrast here with Carlyle and Ruskin--he was an ardent democrat, . . ." ²⁷ Somervell seems to imply that H. M. Hyndman was the "real" revolutionary, although it is quite clear that Morris left the Federation to form his own Socialist League because he thought Hyndman was too interested in parliamentary "pallatives," and because Hyndman was not revolutionary enough! Moreover, although it is history that Morris

²⁶Vida D. Scudder, Social Ideals in English Letters (Chautauqua, New York: The Chautauqua Press, 1922), pp. 289-90.

²⁷D. C. Somervell, English Thought in the Nineteenth Century (1929; rpt. London: Methuen, 1964), p. 154.

withdrew his support from the Socialist League because it had become dominated by the Anarchists, whose tactics and theories he publicly denounced, Crane Brinton insists that Morris "like so many other excellent men, is an anarchist at heart."²⁸ Roland Stromberg describes William Morris as "the great Victorian artist, poet, and craftsman, who popularized 'guild socialism,' a return to the spirit of medieval artisans."²⁹ Although Morris did not announce his acceptance of Socialism until 1883--he was almost fifty years old at the time--yet Raymond Chapman quotes part of Morris' The Earthly Paradise (1868-70), written fifteen years earlier, to demonstrate "how far he was in some respects from the main channel of socialist development."³⁰

Examples of this sort of thinking are numerous in discussions of William Morris, and it is not necessary to cite them all. However, one final example is offered to illustrate the extremes to which some scholars have gone to disassociate Morris' art from his Marxism.

²⁸ Crane Brinton, English Political Thought in the 19th Century (1933; rpt. New York and Evanston: Harper Torchbooks, Harper and Row, 1962), p. 263.

²⁹ Roland N. Stromberg, An Intellectual History of Modern Europe (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1966), pp. 311-12.

³⁰ Raymond Chapman, The Victorian Debate: English Literature and Society 1832-1901 (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1968), p. 253.

Attempting to dismiss the influence of Marxian economics on Morris, Lloyd Eshleman writes,

In brief, therefore, Morris believed that all historic progress and decay can be interpreted in terms of the interplay between art and society, artistic causes and effects taking precedence over all others.

It is this philosophy of historic change which caused Morris to disagree at heart with the "economics" and "historical materialism" of Karl Marx's Das Kapital (just as a similar philosophy caused Benedetto Croce to disagree many years later) and to write to the members of the Marxian Social Democratic Federation that any one who believes that "knife and fork" economics takes precedence over "art and cultivation . . . does not understand what art means." For art, to Morris, included economics, in so far as conditions governing the life and labour of a people were concerned.³¹

Forgetting for the moment other writings in which Morris explicitly enunciates this belief in class antagonism as the basis of historical change and his belief that society is founded on man's need to satisfy his material necessities,³² one has only to read the lecture that Eshleman is quoting. The passage is taken from Morris' "How I Became a Socialist," written for Justice in 1894; the passage reads,

Surely any one who professes to think that the question of art and cultivation must go before that of the knife and fork (and there are some who propose that) does not understand what art

³¹Lloyd W. Eshleman, A Victorian Rebel: The Life of William Morris (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1940), pp. 175-76.

³²Cf. Henderson, The Letters of William Morris, pp. 282-91.

means, or how that its roots must have a soil of a thriving and unanxious life.³³

In fact, Morris is asserting exactly the opposite of what Eshleman says he is; Morris is asserting the priority of material necessity. If Eshleman is not deliberately falsifying the passage, then surely his interpretation is based on an incredibly careless misreading of Morris' argument.

As I have already indicated, the attempt to separate Morris the Marxist from Morris the artist began while he was still alive. After his death this trend continued and was reinforced by Morris' first biographer, John Williams Mackail, who was openly hostile to Morris' politics.³⁴ Another apparent source of this attempt at disassociating Morris from Marxism is found in the memoirs

³³ Morris, Works, XXIII, 281.

³⁴ Cf. John Williams Mackail, The Life of William Morris, Two Volumes in One (1899; rpt. London: Longman, Green and Co., 1922). Mackail's problems with Morris' politics are numerous. He discusses the "evil" of the extremists (i.e., the SDF) and says that their Manifesto had "gone far in advance of anything that was in his [Morris'] mind" (II, 121-22). However, on the following page he quotes a letter written by Morris to a Mr. Horsfall, where Morris says: "'In a few words that I have to say about the manifesto is, that, though I may not like the taste of some of the wording, I do agree with the substance of it (or I should not have signed it).'" (II, 123). George Bernard Shaw recalls that Mackail believed Morris' communism to be a "'deplorable aberration. . . . From his point of view Morris took to Socialism as Poe took to drink'" (Cited in Page Arnot, William Morris: The Man and The Myth, Including Letters of William Morris to J. L. Mahon and Dr. John Glasse [New York: Monthly Review Press, 1964], p. 110).

of Morris' friend, Bruce Glasier, who, in his William Morris and the Early Days of the Socialist Movement (1921), attempted to show Morris' indifference to Marx's theory of value, "and other Marxist ideas" that "did not really belong to his own sphere of Socialist thought."³⁵ However, scarcely six years later Professor Helmholtz-Phelan argued that "Morris accepted the Marxian theory of labor as the explanation of value, and the theory that over and above the subsistence wage that he receives, the worker produces for the benefit of the capitalist a surplus value."³⁶ By 1934 John Middleton Murry was asserting, "If the Socialist movement in this country could have remained faithful to Morris it would have remained faithful to Marx also; if it could have remained faithful to Marx, it would have remained faithful to Morris also. For Morris was the truest Marxian Socialist this country has ever had."³⁷

³⁵ John Bruce Glasier, William Morris and the Early Days of the Socialist Movement: Being Reminiscences of Morris' Work as a Propagandist, and Observations of His Character and Genius, With Some Account of the Persons and Circumstances of the Early Socialist Agitation; Together with a Series of Letters Addressed by Morris to the Author . . . With a Preface by May Morris, 2nd ed. (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1921), pp. 142, 143.

³⁶ Helmholtz-Phelan, The Social Philosophy of William Morris, p. 137 (footnote).

³⁷ John Middleton Murry, "William Morris," The Adelphi, 8, No. 3 (June, 1934), 166.

Today, beginning with Edward Thompson's biography of Morris (1955) and culminating in Paul Thompson's The Work of William Morris (1967),³⁸ Mackail's and Glasier's accounts of Morris' connection have been challenged, and Morris' Marxism has been fully documented and firmly established.³⁹ The evidence for Morris' acceptance of Marxism from 1883 onwards can be summarized as follows:⁴⁰

- (1) Morris made no public or private statements denying his acceptance of Marxism.
- (2) In 1883, with H. M. Hyndman, Morris wrote A Summary of the Principles of Socialism, which is basically Marxist in theory.
- (3) After his break with the Social Democratic Federation and his forming of the Socialist League (1884), Morris identified his views with Marxism; Engels concurred with him.
- (4) In his lectures and letters, Morris made numerous references to Marx's Capital--all of them complimentary.
- (5) In the series of articles for the Commonweal, written with Belfort Bax entitled "Socialism from the Root Up" (1886-87) and later published in 1894 as Socialism: Its Growth and Outcome, Marx and Engels are credited with the full and complete development of Socialist theory. Morris ends a summary of Capital (volume I) by calling it an "epoch making

³⁸ Paul Thompson, The Work of William Morris (London: Heinemann, 1967), pp. 198, 220-241.

³⁹ See especially Edward Thompson, "Appendix IV: William Morris, Bruce Glasier and Marxism," in William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary, pp. 886-99.

⁴⁰ I am taking a large portion of my summary from Edward Thompson and Page Arnot.

work."⁴¹ The work demonstrates Morris' full acceptance of Marxism. That Morris understood and accepted Marx's economics is also collaborated by Morris' summation of the economics of Capital contained in Morris' copy of Capital which he gave to J. L. Mahon, first secretary of the Socialist League.

- (6) Morris' four letters written to the Rev. George Bainton from 2 April 1888 to 6 May 1888 are conclusive evidence of Morris' Marxism.⁴²

George Bernard Shaw wrote that Morris "had read all the Socialist scriptures and economic textbooks: not only Marx's epoch-making exposure of capitalist civilization but John Stuart Mill's examination of Communism," and that Morris "was on the side of Karl Marx contra mundum."⁴³ In a heated exchange with the then Prime Minister, Clement Atlee, William Gallacher, the parliamentary leader of the Communist Party in 1948, argued, "The Communist ideology was there in the writings, speeches and poems of the great artist and poet, William Morris, long before there was a Soviet Russia."⁴⁴ In a polemic against those who would disassociate Morris from Marxism, Arnot writes,

It does not matter to myth-mongers that Morris' first political utterances display his consciousness of class antagonism and class hatred; . . .

⁴¹William Morris and Ernst Belfort Bax, Socialism: Its Growth and Outcome (London: Swan Sonnenschein and Co., 1893), p. 267.

⁴²Henderson, pp. 282-91.

⁴³George Bernard Shaw, "Morris as I Knew Him," in May Morris, Works, II, ix.

⁴⁴Cited in Arnot, p. 125.

in his whole writings during the period of his political activity Morris is accepting and following as best he can the teachings of Marx on political economy, the antagonism of classes in history and the strategy of the long struggle that would lead to revolution.⁴⁵

It should be noted that practically all of the evidence for Morris' Marxism dates from 1883 onwards. To what extent he was essentially a Marxist before this time is still very much a question of debate. Moreover, since this study is focusing on Marx's contribution to English aesthetic theory and literary criticism, it will focus on Morris' work after 1883 and will touch only marginally on his association with the Pre-Raphaelite Movement and his writings before 1883. Morris himself denies that he experienced any dramatic "conversion" to Socialism. Before he became a socialist, he saw civilization moving in a direction that would put "a counting house on the top of the cinderheap, with Podsnap's drawing-room in the offing."⁴⁶ But, Morris writes, "I did not know why it was so."⁴⁷ His readings in Marx and the

⁴⁵ Arnot, p. 12.

⁴⁶ Morris, "How I Became a Socialist," Works, XXIII, 279. Morris, who said that he "worshipped" Dickens, took "Podsnappery" as characteristic of middle class life. Edward Thompson writes: "In his Socialist years, Morris was to publish extracts from this chapter [i.e., from Our Mutual Friend] in the Commonweal. As he saw it, Dickens had drawn not just a caricature of a City man, but the very type of bourgeois philistinism of these years" (p. 167).

⁴⁷ Morris, loc. cit.; italics mine.

other socialists, along with "continuous conversations with such Marxist friends as Bax, Hyndman and Scheux" provided him with an explanation for what had happened in the past, for what he saw around him in the present, and for the direction in which society seemed to be heading.⁴⁸

In "The Aesthetic Opinions of William Morris," Jessie Kocmanova writes that

It would be . . . a grave mistake to see Morris' acceptance of Marxism and socialism as in any fundamental sense a break with his past life and work. It was rather a revelation, which permitted his lifelong aims and interests to fall into a logical sequence and to be worked out systematically in the years from about 1877 to the end of his life, enabling him to rid himself of the despair and sense of doom which during the seventies and early eighties found expression in his personal letters.⁴⁹

Arnot writes that even before Morris had read Marx, he "reached the two-fold conclusion: first, that art must perish unless it be a people's art; secondly, that the worker must be an artist and the artist must be a worker."⁵⁰

Paul Thompson adds that it is difficult to trace the development of Morris' ideas before 1877 because almost all of his theoretical writing dates from this time, the year he began his public lectures; however, Thompson

⁴⁸Ibid., pp. 277-78.

⁴⁹Jessie Kocmanova, "The Aesthetic Opinions of William Morris," Comparative Literature Studies, IV, No. 4 (1967), 411.

⁵⁰Arnot, p. 19.

argues, "He was already fully conscious of the existence of class conflict in 1877, but it was not until 1883, when he first read Marx, that he saw it as a positive force for change. The final stage in his thought was the grafting of socialist thinking onto his own previous theory to produce this vision of the future."⁵¹ Morris' coming to Marx is explained by Margaret Grennan:

Morris became a socialist first and read Marx afterwards; so the philosophy of Capital, in so far as he understood it, supplemented and modified rather than moulded Morris' views. . . .⁵²

As Professor Helmholtz-Phelan argues, after 1883 Morris "found it impossible to lecture on Art and its principles without leavening the whole with his Socialist doctrine."⁵³

William Morris and the Beginnings of English Marxist Aesthetics

For Morris, Ruskin and Marx, the criticism of society is implicit in the idea of art. All three see art as an instinctive creative impulse, which, as Ruskin says, "is the work of the whole living creature, body and soul"⁵⁴ and which finds its expression in man's basic

⁵¹Paul Thompson, The Work of William Morris, p. 220.

⁵²Margaret R. Grennan, William Morris: Medievalist and Revolutionary (Morningside Heights, N.Y.: King's Crown Press, 1945), p. 56.

⁵³Helmholtz-Phelan, p. 70.

⁵⁴From The Stones of Venice, Vol. III, chapt. 4, cited in Kenneth Clark, Ruskin Today (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964), p. 145.

activity--his labor. Indeed, in his Preface to the Kelmscott edition of Ruskin's "The Nature of the Gothic," Morris argues that Ruskin's great "lesson" is his insistence "that art is the expression of man's pleasure in labour; that it is possible for man to rejoice in his work."⁵⁵ By the same token, all three see man's creative impulse as distorted and suppressed by forces at work in bourgeois society. However, as Granville Hicks observes, "Because he did not understand capitalism and looked back to feudalism, he [Ruskin] was in certain ways as reactionary as Carlyle, and it was no accident that he stood with Carlyle in defense of the murderous Governor Eyre of Jamaica."⁵⁶

By contrast, Morris combines his own historical knowledge and the moral protest of Carlyle, Ruskin and Arnold with Marx's emphasis on economics and praxis. When Morris looks to the past it is in terms of constructing images of the future in order to motivate action in the present. Unlike Marx, Morris is unaware of major recent developments in western philosophy; he is weak in analysis and systematic thinking. At the same time, he is at one with Marx in believing that thought and theory

⁵⁵ May Morris, Works, I, 292-93.

⁵⁶ Granville Hicks, "The Social Criticism of John Ruskin," International Literature, 2 (February, 1938), 79.

must be made concrete and united to action. It is for this reason that he says that Ruskin is not a "practical" Socialist. As Edward Thompson argues, "Action--this is the constant theme of his lectures."⁵⁷ Like Ruskin, Marx and Morris use aesthetic criteria to condemn bourgeois society, and both Marx's and Morris' future utopias are aesthetic utopias. However, unlike Ruskin, they believe that it is possible to realize this future. Indeed, through the revolutionary act of the proletariat it is inevitable that it will be realized.

Morris and the Relationship Between Art and Society

In assessing Marx's influence on Morris and Morris' influence on the direction of English aesthetics and literary criticism, it should be noted that almost all of Morris' important theoretical ideas originate and develop from his observations on architecture, the decorative arts (including pottery, pattern designing, glass making, tapestry, dress, printing, etc.), and painting. Morris never considers himself a literary critic and has very little use for professional criticism. However, it would be a serious mistake to separate his views on art from his literary judgments. Morris' definitions of art are broad enough to include literature; here, for example, are three definitions:

⁵⁷Edward Thompson, p. 293.

- (1) "That thing which I understand by real art is the expression by man of his pleasure in labour."⁵⁸
- (2) ". . . what I mean by an art is some creation of man which appeals to his emotions and his intellect by means of his senses. All the greater arts appeal directly to that intricate combination of intuitive perceptions, feelings, experience, and memory which is called imagination."⁵⁹
- (3) ". . . I use the word art in a wider sense than is commonly used amongst us today; for convenience sake, indeed, I will exclude all appeals to the intellect and emotions that are not addressed to the eyesight, though properly speaking, music and all literature that deals with style should be considered as portions of art. . . ."⁶⁰

Second, Morris makes explicit connections between literature and the other arts. He says, for example, that "the revival of the art of architecture in Great Britain may be said to have been a natural consequence of the rise of the romantic school in literature, although it lagged some way behind it, and naturally so, since the art of building has to deal with the prosaic incidents of everyday life, and is limited by the material exigencies of its existence."⁶¹ More importantly, when discussing the decline of art in Victorian society, Morris expressly links the fate of poetry and music to that of

⁵⁸ Morris, "The Art of the People," Works, XXII, 42.

⁵⁹ Morris, "The Lesser Arts of Life," Works, XXII, 235.

⁶⁰ Morris, "The Socialist Ideal," Works, XXIII, 255.

⁶¹ Morris, "The Revival of Architecture," Works, XXII, 318.

architecture: "Architecture, Sculpture, Painting, with the crowd of lesser arts that belong to them, these, together with Music and Poetry, will be dead and forgotten, . . . we must not deceive ourselves; the death of one art means the death of all."⁶²

Morris uses an organic metaphor to discuss questions of art and its relationship to society. "The growth of art" is, Morris writes, "like all growth, it was good and fruitful for a while; like all fruitful growth, it grew into decay; like all decay of what was once fruitful, it will grow into something new."⁶³ Moreover, it is precisely this "organic" relationship between art and society that Morris is seeking to regain. In contrasting the "culture" of the past with the "civilization" of the present, Morris distinguishes between an "organic" and a "mechanical" society:

The difference between these opposing circumstances of society is, in fact, that between an organism and a mechanism. The earlier condition in which everything, art, science (so far as it went), law, industry, were personal, and aspects of a living body, is opposed to the civilized condition in which all these elements have become mechanical, uniting to build up mechanical life, and themselves the product of machines material and moral.⁶⁴

⁶² Morris, "The Lesser Arts," Works, XXII, 10; italics mine.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 9.

⁶⁴ Morris and Bax, Socialism, p. 79. For a more complete discussion of this aspect of Morris' thought, see Herbert L. Sussman, Victorians and the Machine: The Literary Response to Technology (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968).

The arts are functionally related to society as parts of a machine to its whole, but they are not organically related as to "a living body," It is only after the triumph of Socialism that they will become so.⁶⁵

Like Ruskin, Morris believes that "art is and must be, either in its abundance or its barrenness, in its sincerity or its hollowness, the expression of the society amongst which it exists."⁶⁶ But Morris goes

⁶⁵ Both conservatives and socialists used the concept of an organic society for attacking social organization of nineteenth-century society. Raymond Williams writes:

It is, however, perhaps one of the most important facts about English social thinking in the nineteenth century that there grew up, in opposition to a laissez-faire society, this organic conception, stressing interrelation and interdependence. This conception was at one point the basis of an attack on the conditions of men in 'industrial production,' the 'cash-nexus' their only active relation, and on the claims of middle-class political democracy. Meanwhile, at another point, it was the basis of an attack on industrial capitalism, and on the limitations of triumphant middle-class liberalism. One kind of conservative thinker, and one kind of socialist thinker, seemed thus to use the same terms, not only for criticizing a laissez-faire society, but also for expressing the idea of a superior society. This situation persisted, in that 'organic' is now a central term both in this kind of conservative thinking [i.e., Ruskin's] and in Marxist thinking. The common enemy . . . is liberalism.

Burke was perhaps the last serious thinker who could find the 'organic' in an existing society. As the new industrial society established itself, critics like Carlyle and Ruskin could find the 'organic' image only in a backward look: this is the basis of their 'mediaevalism,' and that of others. It was not, in this tradition, until Morris that this image acquired a distinctly future reference--the image of socialism. Even in Morris . . . the backward reference is still important and active (Culture and Society, pp. 140-41; italics mine).

⁶⁶ Morris, "The Aims of Art," Works, XXIII, 84.

beyond Ruskin. Society is not an abstraction over and above man; like Marx, Morris believes that "man must and does create the conditions under which he lives."⁶⁷ In praxis, specifically in his labor, man creates his society. Morris assumes that "since man has certain material necessities as an animal, Society is founded on man's attempts to satisfy those necessities."⁶⁸ Furthermore, Morris' conception of man is not one of an abstract, autonomous individual that exists prior to society; he begins with the assumption that man is "a social being, . . . man as a social animal."⁶⁹ Like Ruskin, Morris believes that "it is not possible to dissociate art from morality, politics, and religion,"⁷⁰ but he again goes beyond Ruskin to Marx by insisting that these elements, which constitute "the life, habits, and aspirations of all groups and classes of the community are founded on the economical conditions under which the mass of people live."⁷¹ It is not the "ruling ideas" of a period, the Weltanschauung, that determine man's actions; on the contrary, it is man's

⁶⁷Morris, "The Society of the Future," in May Morris, Works, II, 456.

⁶⁸Morris, "Letter to the Rev. George Bainton (2 April 1888)," Henderson, Letters, p. 282.

⁶⁹Morris, loc. cit.

⁷⁰Morris, "The Art of the People," Works, XXII, 47.

⁷¹Morris, "The Revival of Handicraft," Works, XXII, 332.

actions, particularly his struggle with nature in his labor, that determine his social relations, and hence the "spirit of the times." For example, Morris argues that "the Reformation itself was but one of the aspects of the new spirit of the time produced by great economical changes."⁷² For Ruskin, progress is dependent on each man, as an individual becoming moral and assuming his ethical responsibility,⁷³ but Morris argues that "the world cannot take a step forward in justice, honesty and kindness, without a corresponding goal in all the material conditions of life,"⁷⁴ because "all" of man's "morals, laws, religion, are in fact the outcome and reflection of this ceaseless toil of earning his livelihood."⁷⁵ The contrast between Ruskin's thought and Morris' is easily discernible. In each case, Morris is extending and modifying Ruskin's ideas to include Marxism's insistence on the priority of man's social existence whose modes are basically determined by his labor in his

⁷²Morris, "Architecture and History," Works, XXII, 308.

⁷³Cf. Robert Kimbrough, "Calm Between Crisis: Pattern and Direction in Ruskin's Mature Thought," Transactions of the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences Arts and Letters, 49 (1960), 219-27; reprinted in Shiv K. Kumar, British Victorian Literature: Recent Revaluations (London: University of London Press, 1969), pp. 345-56.

⁷⁴Morris, "The Society of the Future," in May Morris, Works, II, 454.

⁷⁵Morris, "How We Live and How We Might Live," Works, XXIII, 14.

struggle to control nature and to create the material conditions necessary for his survival.

It is not surprising then that Morris argues that "all art, even the highest, is influenced by the conditions of labour of the mass of mankind, and that any pretensions which may be made for even the highest intellectual art to be independent of these general conditions are futile and vain."⁷⁶ Indeed, the conditions of labor are the conditions of art. With Ruskin and Marx, Morris believes that "ART IS MAN'S EXPRESSION OF HIS JOY IN LABOUR."⁷⁷ It is for this reason that Morris finds it "impossible to exclude socio-political questions from the considerations of aesthetics."⁷⁸ At the same time, Morris is not arguing for just any aesthetics, but for a Socialist aesthetics. He writes, ". . . I assert first that Socialism is an all-embracing theory of life, and that as it has an ethic and a religion of its own, so also it has an aesthetic: so that to every one who wishes to study Socialism duly it is necessary to look on it from the aesthetic point of view."⁷⁹ One can judge aesthetics

⁷⁶Morris, "Art Under Plutocracy," Works, XXIII, 173.

⁷⁷Morris, loc. cit.

⁷⁸Morris, "The Revival of Handicraft," Works, XXII, 332.

⁷⁹Morris, "The Socialist Ideal," Works, XXIII, 255.

from the perspective of socialism, or one can judge socialism from the point of view of aesthetics: Marx and Morris do both.

Morris begins with "a law of nature for man," that "he must labour in order to live--. . ." ⁸⁰ He then goes on to agree with Ruskin that "art is the expression of man's joy in labour." However, since Morris is never given to explicit definitions, one is never quite certain what he means by "the expression of man's joy." In "The Aims of Art," he writes,

. . . the end proposed by a work of art is always to please the person whose senses are to be made conscious of it. It was done for someone who was to be made happier by it; his idle or restful mood was to be amused by it, so that the vacancy which is the besetting evil of that mood might give place to pleased contemplation dreaming, or what you will; and by this means he would not so soon be driven into his workful or energetic mood; he would have more enjoyment, and better.

The restraining of restlessness, therefore, is clearly one of the essential aims of art, and few things could add to the pleasure of life more than this.

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Therefore the Aim of Art is to increase the happiness of men, by giving them beauty and interest of incident to amuse their leisure, and prevent them wearying even of rest, and by giving them hope and bodily pleasure in their work; or, shortly, to make man's work happy and his rest fruitful. Consequently, genuine art is an unmixed blessing to the race of man. ⁸¹

⁸⁰ Morris, "Monopoly: Or, How Labour is Robbed," Works, XXIII, 238.

⁸¹ Works, XXII, 82, 84.

This is about as detailed as Morris ever gets in defining the particular quality of aesthetic experience. The important point here is that Morris' conception of the nature of the aesthetic experience, vague as it is, seems similar to Marx's. In the act of producing a work of art or in the act of experiencing it, there is a moment of "consummation." The psychological effect is one of "pleased contemplation," amusement, "bodily pleasure," a stasis that has the effect of "restraining restlessness."

It should also be noted that Morris is stressing the active nature of art. Rather than on any particular content or form, his emphasis is on the act itself. For Morris, art is both expression and communication. As he says, "it was done for someone." Art must have order and meaning. Morris writes, "Without order your work cannot even exist; without meaning, it were better not to exist."⁸² Furthermore, art must not only have meaning for the artist, but the artist must communicate that meaning; Morris argues that the artist must "not only mean something . . . but must be able to make others understand that meaning. They say that the difference between a genius and a madman is that the genius can get one or two people to believe in him whereas the madman, poor

⁸²Morris, "Making the Best of It," Works, XXII, 106.

fellow, has himself only for his audience."⁸³ It is this communicative aspect of art that Morris stresses over and over again. In discussing poetry he writes:

. . . many people think as deeply and as beautifully as poets do, it may be more so, but yet are not poets; their feelings do not come to the point of expression. . . . you think you have expressed your feelings in your verses, but you have not done so, because you have not compelled others (sympathetic people of course), to feel with you.⁸⁴

Here again, by concentrating on the social nature of art and the need for the artist to concern himself with his audience, Morris is clearly distinguishing himself from the more extreme critical statements of the Romantics and the Aesthetes who were at best indifferent to their audiences.

Art, then, is intimately related to man's praxis, his struggle with nature; it "is bound up with the general condition of society, and especially with the lives of those who live by manual labor and whom we call the working classes."⁸⁵ This does not mean for Morris, just as it does not for Marx, that everything that man creates in his labor is automatically art. Unlike Carlyle and Ruskin, Morris does not believe that labor is good

⁸³ Ibid., p. 111.

⁸⁴ Morris, "Letter to Fred Henderson (19 October 1885)," in Edward Thompson, William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary, p. 876.

⁸⁵ Morris, "Art Under Plutocracy," Works, XXIII, 164.

in and for itself. As the title of one of his lectures suggests, man's labor can either be "useful work" or "useless toil."⁸⁶ Morris observes that the "kind and quality" of work "is determined by the social conditions under which [man] lives, which differ much from age to age."⁸⁷ Not all work but only a particular kind of work gives man joy and produces works of art. Morris adamantly opposes those who believe that the road to salvation lies in work--any kind of work. He writes, ". . . it has become an article of the creed of modern morality that all labour is good in itself--a convenient belief to those who live on the labour of others."⁸⁸ In whatever social situation man finds himself, there is one condition that must be met before man can produce art: that condition is freedom. Man must be free, free of material necessity and external coercion. "Art," Morris explains, "cannot be the result of external compulsion; the labour which goes to produce it is voluntary, and partly undertaken for the sake of the labour itself, partly for the sake of the hope of producing something which, when done, shall give pleasure to the user of it."⁸⁹ Morris believes that

⁸⁶ Cf. "Useful Work versus Useless Toil," Works, XXIII.

⁸⁷ Morris, "Architecture and History," Works, XXII, 306.

⁸⁸ Morris, "Useful Work versus Useless Toil," Works, XXIII, 98.

⁸⁹ Morris, "The Aims of Art," Works, XXIII, 83.

there is "an instinct for beauty which is inborn in every complete man;"⁹⁰ he writes,

. . . it seems to me that the sense of beauty in the external world, of interest in the life of man as a drama, and the desire of communicating this sense of beauty and interest to our fellow man is or ought to be an essential part of the humanity of man, and that any man or set of men lacking that sense are less than men, and lack a portion of their birthright just as if they were blind or deaf.⁹¹

Thus, although man has an instinct for beauty and for artistic expression and communication, he can express this element of humanity only if he is free, and this freedom is a product of definite, historical, social, relationships which, in turn, are intimately related to the economic organization of society. For example, Morris writes that early man was not free; like Marx's bee, "he was the slave of his most immediate necessities; Nature was mighty and he was feeble, and he had to wage constant war with her for his daily food and such shelter as he could get. His life was bound down and limited by this constant struggle; all his morals, laws, religion are in fact the outcome and reflection of this ceaseless toil of earning his livelihood."⁹²

⁹⁰ Morris, "Art Under Plutocracy," Works, XXIII, 168.

⁹¹ Morris, "At a Picture Show," in May Morris, Works, II, 409. This lecture was delivered in 1884. It may be merely a coincidence that Morris uses the phrase "the life of man as drama" after he has read Marx, but I can find no use of it before 1883.

⁹² Morris, "How We Live and How We Might Live," Works, XXIII, 14.

Under these conditions, it is impossible to have labour that is free from external compulsion, and man's artistic instincts are thwarted by his constant struggle with nature.⁹³ At the same time, despite civilization and man's spectacular advancements in all areas of life, the situation is not much different in Victorian England. In his own time, Morris sees that freedom is a luxury granted to very few--the idle rich and the capitalists--; freedom for the greater part of mankind is an abstraction, an illusion. Morris argues that bourgeois freedom is "the freedom left most of men free to take at a wretched wage what slave's work lay nearest to them or starve."⁹⁴

Herein lies Morris' criticism of society and the basis of his Socialism. Morris cannot accept a society which denies to any man the freedom to create art in his labor. All men must be in a position to create art and have access to other men's creations. Art for Morris is not "a luxury incidental to a certain privileged position;" on the contrary, "the Socialist claims art as a necessity of human life which society has no right to

⁹³Evidently Morris does not realize that there has never been a society without art; art must be regarded as a constituent element of every social order, even the most primitive. He could not have been familiar, as Christopher Caudwell is, with the work of anthropologists, such as Malinowski, who discuss the function of art in organizing man's struggle with nature.

⁹⁴Morris, "Art and Socialism," Works, XXIII, 204.

withhold from any one of the citizens; . . ."⁹⁵ Morris demands a "Democracy of Art"⁹⁶ which, in turn, demands that every man shall have his "due": "money enough to keep him from bread-earning work (even though it may be pleasant to him) to give him time to read and think, and connect his own life with the life of the great world; work enough of the kind aforesaid, and praise of it, and encouragement enough to feel good friends with his fellows; and lastly (not least, for 'tis verily part of the bargain), his own share of art. . . ."⁹⁷ In short, Morris' demand for a "Democracy of Art" is a demand for a radical change in the social order.

Morris and the Art of the
Past, Present, and Future

Before proceeding with Morris' description of the historical stages in the growth, decline, and rebirth of art, it is necessary to emphasize again that Morris' views are by no means "escapist." His views of the past are always given in terms of organizing action in the present. Morris does not want to return to any idyllic past (even if that were possible); he wants to create a

⁹⁵Morris, "The Socialist Ideal," Works, XXIII, 260.

⁹⁶Morris, "The Beauty of Life," Works, XXII, 79.

⁹⁷Morris, "Making the Best of It," Works, XXII, 116.

set of images and attitudes, some of which he takes from his knowledge of history, in order to change the course of present civilization and to direct it to a different future. As to the use of history, Morris writes, ". . . to my mind it is a strange view to take of historical knowledge and insight that it should set us on the adventure of trying to retrace our steps towards the past, rather than give us some glimmer of insight into the future; a strange view of the continuity of history, that it should make us ignore the very changes which are the essence of that continuity."⁹⁸ History is always seen by Morris in relation to the problematics of the present and his vision of the future.

While it is his medievalism and his ideas concerning the development of art after the Middle Ages that are generally considered most significant, Morris also has some interesting comments concerning pre-Christian art. As always, he focuses on the social basis of art, and his standard of judgment is invariably determined by whether or not this social base is large or small, that is to say, on how large a share the whole population has in producing and consuming art. Moreover, while his criterion never changes, it does involve him in some inconsistencies and contradictions. For example, he claims

⁹⁸Morris, "Architecture and History," Works, XXII, 314-15.

that "down to very recent days everything that the hand of man touched was more or less beautiful; so that in those days all people who made anything, shared in art, as well as all people who used the things so made; that is, all people shared in art . . . from the first dawn of history till quite modern times, Art, which Nature meant to solace all fulfilled its purpose; all men shared in it: . . ." ⁹⁹ But when he comes to discuss Greek art, Morris is obliged to concede that theirs is not a "democracy" of art. Hence, he argues,

. . . I would ask you to remember within what narrow limits that perfection of Greece moved. It seems to me that unless you can have the whole of that severe system of theirs, you will not be bettered by taking to a minor part of it; nor, indeed, do I think that you can have that system now, for it was the servant of a perfection which is no longer attainable. The whole art of the classical ancients, while it was alive and growing, was the art of a society made up of a narrow aristocracy of citizens, waited upon by a large body of slaves, and surrounded by a world of barbarism which was always despised and never noticed till it threatened to overwhelm the self-sufficient aristocracy that called itself the civilized world.¹⁰⁰

In another lecture, with a statement that recalls Ruskin's remarks on "perfection," Morris claims that the Greeks' demands for perfection have the effect of making their art "hard" and unsympathetic."¹⁰¹ On the other hand,

⁹⁹Morris, "The Beauty of Life," Works, XXII, 54, 56.

¹⁰⁰Morris, "Some Hints on Pattern-Designing," Works, XXII, 188.

¹⁰¹Morris, "The History of Pattern-Designing," Works, XXII, 219.

Morris' love for Homer is unquestionable, and four years after he joined the Socialist movement he translated Homer's Odyssey (1887). In his critical comments one can see that Morris is struggling with the same problem that plagued Marx: how can a society that is based on slavery produce great works of art? The issue for Morris, as for Marx, is never fully and satisfactorily resolved.

However, Morris has no doubts about the greatness of medieval art. In the Middle Ages, art "was the art of free men. Whatever slavery still existed in the world (more than enough, as always) art had no share in it; . . ." ¹⁰² During this period, art appeared "to have conquered everything, and laid the material world underfoot." ¹⁰³ As Morris describes it,

. . . [medieval art] was the outcome of instinct working on an unbroken chain of tradition: it was fed not by knowledge but by hope, and though many a strange and wild illusion mingled with that hope, yet it was human and fruitful ever; many a man it solaced, a slave in body it freed in soul; boundless pleasure it gave to those who had wrought it and those who used it; long and long it lived, passing that torch of hope from hand to hand, while it kept but little record of its best and noblest; . . . every man's hand and soul it used, the lowest as the highest, and in its bosom at least were all free: it did its work, not creating an art more perfect than itself, but rather other things than art, freedom of thought and speech, and the longing

¹⁰² Morris, "Art and the Beauty of the Earth," Works, XXII, 159.

¹⁰³ Morris, "The Beauty of Life," Works, XXII, 56.

for light and knowledge and the coming days that should slay it: . . .¹⁰⁴

Furthermore, Morris argues that the great men of the Renaissance, Shakespeare for example, were in reality "the fruit of the old, not the seed of the new order of things."¹⁰⁵

Anyone with even a rudimentary knowledge of the Middle Ages realizes that Morris is presenting a selective and idealized picture. However, the issue is not whether or not the picture is an accurate description of the medieval period but rather the artistic values that Morris is emphasizing. He sees the artist working in a "tradition," creating an art that gives "boundless pleasure"; it is an art which involves all of the people, "the lowest as the highest." Morris rejects the charge that he is a "mere praiser of past times"; on the contrary, he writes,

I know that in those days of which I speak life was often rough and evil enough, beset by violence, superstition, ignorance, slavery; yet I cannot help thinking that sorely as poor folks needed a solace, they did not altogether lack one, and that solace was pleasure in their work.¹⁰⁶

Morris' judgment of the Middle Ages and its art is based

¹⁰⁴Morris, "The Prospects of Architecture," Works, XXII, 133-34.

¹⁰⁵Morris, "The Beauty of Life," Works, XXII, 57.

¹⁰⁶Morris, "Art and the Beauty of the Earth," Works, XXII, 163.

upon his conception of the way in which that society organized its economic activity and man's relationship to his work. For Morris, as for Marx, whatever problems there were in medieval society, at least there was an organic relationship between the worker and his product; labor was non-alienating. The guild prevented labor from becoming a commodity. In Capital, Marx describes how the organization of the guilds prevented any guild master from becoming a capitalist, made it impossible for a merchant to buy labor as a "commodity," and excluded the division of labor; Marx sums up the situation by arguing, "On the whole, the labourer and his means of production remained closely united, like the snail with its shell, and thus there was wanting the principal basis of manufacture, the separation of the labourer from his means of production, and the conversion of these means into capital."¹⁰⁷ Morris writes that the "medieval man began with production, the modern [man] with money. That is, there was no capital in our sense of the word; . . ."¹⁰⁸ He contrasts the conditions of the medieval workman with the nineteenth century worker:

. . . I must tell you very briefly that he [the medieval worker] lived, however roughly, yet at least far easier than his successor does now. He

¹⁰⁷ Karl Marx, Capital, I, 359.

¹⁰⁸ Morris, "Art and Industry in the Fourteenth Century," Works, XXII, 380.

worked for no master save the public, he made his wares from beginning to end himself, and sold them himself to the man who was going to use them. This was the case at least with nearly all, if not all, the goods made in England: some of the rarer goods, such as silk cloth, did come into the caffering-market, which had to be the case all the more for this, that the materials of any country were chiefly wrought into goods close to their birthplace. But even in the cases of these rarer goods they were made primarily for home consumption, and only the overplus came into the hands of the merchant; concerning the latter you must also remember that he was not a mere gambler in the haphazard of supply and demand as he is today, but an indispensable distributor of goods; he was paid for his trouble in bringing goods from a place where there was more than was needed of them to a country where there was not enough, and that was all; the laws against forestallers and regretters give an idea of how this matter of commerce was looked on in the Middle Ages, as commerce, i.e. not profitmongering.¹⁰⁹

It is the emphasis on man as a producer, on the nature and consequences of production, which lies at the heart of both Marx's and Morris' criticism of society. To be sure, Morris believes that "whatever advantages we have gained over the Middle Ages [they] are not shared by the greater part of our population. The whole of our unskilled labouring classes are in a far worse position as to food, housing, and clothing than any but the extreme fringe of the corresponding class in the Middle Ages."¹¹⁰ But it is not material satisfaction that Morris is emphasizing in his picture of the Middle Ages. The

¹⁰⁹ Morris, "Architecture and History," Works, XXII, 304.

¹¹⁰ Morris and Bax, Socialism, p. 79.

same may be said of Morris' criticism that is said of Marx's; suffering as a result of material need and the existence of poverty are forces for revolutionary change; however, "it is man as frustrated producer rather than man as dissatisfied consumer who makes a revolution."¹¹¹ Robert Tucker argues--and this would apply to Morris as well--that

The enslavement and dehumanization of man under the division of labour is a dominant theme of Capital and the other writings of Marx and Engels on capitalism and the proletarian revolution. They morally condemn capitalism not for being unjust as a mode of distribution (indeed, they hold that it is the only just one in terms of the sole applicable criterion of judgement), but for being inhuman as a mode of production, an unnatural way for man to carry on his productive activity. What makes it so, they maintain, is above all the hideous extreme to which it develops the division of labour. . . .¹¹²

For Marx and for Morris it is the frustration of man's instinctive need to create art in his everyday labor which constitutes the springs of revolution. Whether one agrees with them or not, they both believe that this need was generally satisfied in feudal society.

Beginning with the Renaissance until the present time, with the rise of the bourgeoisie, the development of capitalism and the increasing division of labor, the production and consumption of art gradually became the privilege of an elite. Morris does not see the Renaissance

¹¹¹ Tucker, The Marxian Revolutionary Idea, p. 17.

¹¹² Ibid., pp. 22, 23.

as a time for a "New Birth" of the arts. Indeed, he believes that the great works of the Renaissance are the culmination of the medieval period rather than the beginning of a new direction. More importantly, he argues that "the men of the Renaissance lent all their energies, consciously or unconsciously, to the severance of art from the daily lives of men. . . ." ¹¹³ The result of this trend, which has its origins in the Renaissance, is that art is now "the exclusive privilege of a few, and [this] has taken from the people their birthright. . . ." ¹¹⁴ At the same time, as a result of division of labor, the "fine arts" become separated from the "applied arts," each trying to go its separate way. The artist achieves a special social status which ultimately results in his isolation from bourgeois society and his producing for an indifferent and uncomprehending audience.

It is clear that Morris' understanding of society's historical development from the Middle Ages onward draws on Carlyle and on Ruskin. At the same time, it is equally clear that Morris is leaning heavily on Marx for his economic interpretation of that development. For example, in a lecture in which he sums up his views, Morris makes explicit his debt to Marx's Capital:

¹¹³ Morris, "Art and the Beauty of Life," Works, XXII, 162.

¹¹⁴ Morris, "The Beauty of Life," Works, XXII, 57.

I must assume that many or perhaps most of my readers are not acquainted with Socialist literature, and that few of them have read the admirable account of the different epochs of production given in Karl Marx's "Capital." I must ask to be excused, therefore, for stating very briefly what, chiefly owing to Marx, has become a commonplace of Socialism, but is not generally known outside it. There have been three great epochs of production since the beginning of the Middle Ages. During the first or mediaeval period all production was individualistic in method; for though the workmen were combined into great associations for protection and the organization of labour, they were so associated as citizens, not as mere workmen. There was little or no division of labour, and what machinery was used was simply of the nature of the multiplied tool, a help to the workman's hand-labour and not a supplanter of it. The workman worked for himself and not for any capitalistic employer, and he was accordingly master of his work and his time; this was the period of pure handicraft. When in the latter half of the sixteenth century the capitalist employer and the so-called free workman began to appear, the workmen were collected into workshops, the old tool-machines were improved, and at last a new invention, the division of labour, found its way into the workshops. The division of labour went on growing throughout the seventeenth century and was perfected in the eighteenth, when the unit of labour became a group and not a single man; or in other words the workman became a mere part of a machine composed sometimes wholly of human beings and sometimes of human beings plus labour-saving machines, which towards the end of this period were being copiously invented; the fly-shuttle may be taken for an example of these. The latter half of the eighteenth century saw the beginning of the last epoch of production that the world has known, that of the automatic machine which supercedes hand-labour, and turns the workman who was once an handicraftsman helped by tools, and next a part of a machine, into a tender of machines. And as far as we can see, the revolution in this direction as to kind is complete, though as to degree, . . . the tendency is towards the displacement of ever more and more "muscular" labour. . . .115

¹¹⁵Morris, "The Revival of Handicraft," Works, XXII, 334-35.

The important elements to note here are Morris' emphasis on the changing nature of work and its effect on the worker. For Morris, history is not a history of ideas but of man's actions, specifically his modes of production and the social relations which are a result of these modes. Morris insists that the "birth and growth of this division of labour was no mere accident, was not the result, I mean, of some passing and inexplicable fashion which caused men to desire the kind of work which could be done by such means; it was caused by the economical changes which forced men to produce no longer for a livelihood as they used to do, but for a profit."¹¹⁶ Morris' interpretation of the historical development of the division of labor and its attendant social relations is Marxist at its core.

According to Morris, the consequences of this historical development are terrible and frightening. As Carlyle predicted, the feudal bond has been replaced by the "cash nexus," and man has replaced Christianity with the "present gospel of Capital." England has become a society of "two nations." Morris writes,

. . . the contrast between rich and poor has been fearfully intensified, so that in all civilized countries, but most of all in England, the terrible spectacle is exhibited of two peoples living street by street and door by door, people of the same blood, the same tongue, and at least nominally living under the same laws, but yet one civilized and the other uncivilized. All this I say is the result of the system that has trampled down Art, and exalted Commerce into a sacred religion.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ Morris, "Architecture and History," Works, XXII, 310.

¹¹⁷ Morris, "Art and Socialism," Works, XXIII, 193-94.

The worker has become a "slave to machinery; the new machine must be invented, and when invented, he must-- I will not say use it, but be used by it." Morris asks, "But why is he the slave to machinery?" And he answers, "Because he is the slave to the system for whose existence the invention of machinery was necessary. . . . [the 'slaves' are] proletarians, human beings working to live that they may live to work."¹¹⁸

From such conditions, Morris argues that "no art, not even the feeblest, rudest, or least intelligent, can come. . . ."¹¹⁹ As a result, the workman is degraded, alienated; this work "makes the workman less than a man."¹²⁰ It is not a matter of distributive justice; paying the worker a hundred times what he is now receiving will not solve the problem. Morris sees man alienated in his labor, reduced to either a machine or a slave to a machine, unable to experience the joy of the consummatory moment because unable to see beyond his own isolated and fragmented part in the act of production. For these reasons, Morris insists that "nothing can compensate him or us for such degradation."¹²¹

¹¹⁸ Morris, "The Aims of Art," Works, XXIII, 88-89.

¹¹⁹ Morris, "The Prospects of Architecture," Works, XXII, 144.

¹²⁰ Morris, loc. cit.

¹²¹ Morris, loc. cit.; italics mine.

Not only is the worker a slave to the machine, but all members of society are slaves to the world market: "the market is the master, the man the slave."¹²² Because the capitalist produces not for use but for exchange and profit, "public needs are subordinated to the interest of the capitalist masters of the market, and they can force the public to put up with the less desirable articles if they choose as they generally do." Just as the worker loses his freedom in production, the public loses its freedom in consumption:

The result is that in this direction our boasted individuality is a sham; and persons who wish anything that deviates ever so little from the beaten path have either to wear away their lives in a wearisome and mostly futile contest with a stupendous organization which disregards their wishes, or to allow those wishes to be crushed for the sake of a quiet life.¹²³

Morris insists that in any society man must surrender some of his freedom for the common good; at the same time, however, he argues that "at bottom that surrender should be part of the liberty itself; it should be voluntary in essence." But under capitalism, the producer's and consumers' surrender of freedom is not voluntary, nor can it be regained by wishful thinking. Indeed, any society that "has violated the essential conditions of its existence, must be sustained by mere brute force,

¹²²Morris, "Art and Its Producers," Works, XXII, 349.

¹²³Morris, "The Revival of Handicraft," Works, XXII, 332-33.

and that is the case with our modern society no less than that of the ancient slave holding and the medieval serf-holding societies."¹²⁴ The continued existence of capitalism and its mode of social relationships is guaranteed by the political and material power of the State.

Under these conditions, the survival of art is at best problematic: "The poet, the artist, the man of science . . . are thwarted at every turn by Commercial War, and with its sneering question 'Will it pay?'"¹²⁵ Even among those privileged few who have access to art, "there are many high-minded thoughtful and cultivated men who inwardly think the arts to be a foolish accident of civilization--nay, worse perhaps, a nuisance, a disease, a hindrance to human progress."¹²⁶ Just as Dickens does in Hard Times, Morris is attacking the Utilitarians, who would apply Benthamite standards to works of the imagination. From Morris' point of view, egotistic self-interest and Utilitarianism are necessary ideological reflections of a society whose economic base rests on unbridled competition; people are victims of "an intellectual slavery

¹²⁴Morris, "True and False Society," Works, XXIII, 228-29.

¹²⁵Morris, "Art and Socialism," Works, XXIII, 206.

¹²⁶Morris, "The Art of the People," Works, XXII, 30.

which is a necessary accompaniment of their material slavery."¹²⁷

However, the great mass of people have no choice in the matter. They can neither accept nor reject art because they have no experience of it, either in its production or consumption. What the workers are exposed to --what today would be called "mass culture" or "popular culture"--Morris calls "popular amusements." For these he has nothing but contempt:

. . . few things sadden me so much as the amusements which are thought good enough for the workers; such a miserable killing--yea, murder--of the little scraps of their scanty leisure time as they are. Though indeed if you say that there is not so much contrast here between the worker's public amusements and those provided for the middle classes, I must admit it. . . .¹²⁸

Along with the "two nations," there exist two cultures. For Morris, this situation is most vividly brought home by his observations that "there are two languages talked in England today: gentleman's English and workman's English. . . . This is barbarous and dangerous; and it goes step by step with the lack of art which the same classes are forced into. . . ."¹²⁹ Morris finds neither language suitable:

¹²⁷Morris, "Communism," Works, XXIII, 268.

¹²⁸Morris, "Monopoly: Or, How Labour is Robbed," Works, XXIII, 241.

¹²⁹Morris, "Art, Wealth and Riches," Works, 153-54.

I am told on all hands that my language is too simple to be understood by working-men; that if I wish them to understand me I must use an inferior quality of the newspaper jargon, the language (so-called) of critics and 'superior persons'; and I am almost driven to believe this when I notice the kind of English used by candidates at election time, and by political men generally-- though of course this is complicated by the fact that these gentlemen by no means want to make the meaning of their words clear.¹³⁰

In everyday experience the "drawling snarl or thick vulgarity which one is used to hear from labourers" is a result of their being denied access to art.¹³¹

In this situation, the consumption and "the practice of the arts must be mainly kept in the hands of a few highly cultivated men, who can go often to beautiful places, whose education enables them, in the contemplation of the past glories of the world to shut out from their view the everyday squalors that the most of men move in."¹³² Instead of a Democracy of Art, in which all have a share in its creation and appreciation, art becomes the province of a select elite who zealously guard it against the Philistines and the howling mob. A priesthood of art is formed which regards art as an esoteric mystery whose secrets are revealed only to the initiated. Art becomes an end in itself, having no functional relationship to man's actions or the social process. Ultimately this

¹³⁰ Morris, "Monopoly . . .," Works, XXIII, 241.

¹³¹ Morris, A Dream of John Ball, Works, XVI, 219.

¹³² Morris, "The Lesser Arts," Works, XXII, 25-26.

ends in "art for art's sake," which Morris describes as,

. . . an art cultivated professedly by a few, and for a few, who would consider it necessary--a duty, if they could admit duties--to despise the common herd, to hold themselves aloof from all the world has been struggling for from the first, to guard carefully every approach to their palace of art. It would be a pity to waste many words on the prospect of such a school of art as this, which does in a way, theoretically at least, exist at present, and has for its watchword a piece of slang that does not mean the harmless thing it seems to mean--art for art's sake. Its foredoomed end must be, that art at last will seem too delicate a thing for even the hands of the initiated to touch; and the initiated must at last sit still and do nothing--to the grief of no one.¹³³

Art is "cut off from the traditions of the past" and "from the life of the present. It is the art of a clique and not of the people. The people are too poor to have any share in it."¹³⁴

The artist becomes a lonely, isolated individual "genius," confronting an incomprehending audience. Actually, the situation Morris is describing has its roots in the Romantic Movement and the protest against the Industrial and the Democratic revolutions as they were exemplified in the triumph of bourgeois capitalism. As E. J. Hobsbawm puts it,

The real problem was that of the artist cut off from a recognizable function, patron, or public

¹³³Morris, "The Art of the People," Works, XXII, 38-39.

¹³⁴Morris, "The Socialist Ideal," Works, XXIII, 260.

and left to cast his soul as a commodity upon a blind market, to be bought or not; or to work within a system of patronage which would generally have been economically untenable even if the French Revolution had not established its human indignity. The artist therefore stood alone, shouting into the night, uncertain even of an echo. It was only natural that he should turn himself into the genius, who created only what was within him, regardless of the world and in defiance of a public whose only right was to accept him on his own terms or not at all.¹³⁵

Morris sees this situation as coming to a climax in his own time. Thus he writes that the only "real" art is produced "by unassisted individual genius, the laborious and painful work of men of rare attainments and special culture, who, cumbered as they are by unromantic life and hideous surroundings, do in spite of all manage now and then to break through the hindrances and produce noble works of art. . . ."¹³⁶ This art is available only to the rich, but even if it were somehow made available to all the people they would not understand it; "they are deadened to all art by the hideousness and squalor that surround them."¹³⁷ Ignored or rejected by their society, the artists withdraw either into themselves or into the past. They "wrap themselves up in dreams of Greece and Italy. The days of Pericles and the days of Dante are

¹³⁵E. J. Hobsbawm, The Age of Revolution 1789-1848 (New York: New American Library, 1962), pp. 308-09.

¹³⁶Morris, "Art, Wealth and Riches," Works, XXIII, 147.

¹³⁷Morris, loc. cit.

the days through which they move, and the England of our own day with its millions of eager and struggling people neither helps nor is helped by them."¹³⁸ Morris is not just speaking of the applied arts; he makes the same point with regard to the "Intellectual" arts (painting, music and literature):

As to the first section of artists [i.e., the "Intellectual" artists] who worthily fill their places and make the world wealthier by their work, it must be said of them that they are very few. These men have won their mastery over their craft by dint of incredible toil, pains, and anxiety, by qualities of mind and strength of will which are bound to produce something of value. Nevertheless they are injured also by the system which insists on individualism and forbids co-operation. For first, they are cut off from tradition, that wonderful, almost miraculous accumulation of the skill of ages, which men find themselves partakers in without effort on their part. The knowledge of the past and the sympathy with it which the artists of today have, they have acquired, on the contrary, by their most strenuous individual effort; and as that tradition no longer exists to help them in their practice of the art and they are heavily weighted in the race by having to learn everything from the beginning, each man for himself, so also, and this is worse, the lack of it deprives them of a sympathetic and appreciative audience. Apart from the artists themselves and a few persons who would also be artists but for want of opportunity and for insufficient gifts of hand and eye, there is in the public of to-day no real knowledge of art, and little love for it. Nothing, save at the best certain vague prepossessions, which are but the phantom of that tradition which once bound artist and public together. Therefore the artists are obliged to express themselves as it were in a language not understood [sic.] of the people. Nor is this their fault. If they were to try, as some think they should, to meet the public half-way and work in such a manner as to satisfy at any cost

¹³⁸ Morris, loc. cit.

those vague prepossessions of men ignorant of art, they would be traitors to the cause of art, which it is their duty and glory to serve. They have no choice save to do their own personal individual work unhelped by the present, stimulated by the past, but as possessors of some sacred mystery, which, whatever happens, they must at least do their best to guard. It is not to be doubted that both their own lives and their works are injured by this isolation. But the loss of the people; how are we to measure that? That they should have great men living and working amongst them, and be ignorant of the very existence of their work, and incapable of knowing what it means if they could see it!¹³⁹

This is Morris' position in 1883. However, as Morris' understanding of Marxism deepens, he becomes less and less charitable in his treatment of the contemporary artist and his situation. He begins to understand and to emphasize the artist's class position. In 1886 Morris writes,

It is true that some useful occupations are in the hands of the privileged classes, physic, education, and the fine arts, e.g. The men who work at these occupations are certainly working usefully; and all that we can say against them is that they are sometimes paid too high in proportion to the pay of other useful persons, which high pay is given them in recognition of their being the parasites of the possessing classes.¹⁴⁰

A year later he claims that the "literary men" are working for the ruling class:

. . . they are doing useful service, and ought to be doing it for the community at large, but practically they are only working for a class, and in

¹³⁹Morris, "Art Under Plutocracy," Works, XXIII, 167-68.

¹⁴⁰Morris, "Dawn of a New Epoch," Works, XXIII, 128-29.

their present position are little better than hangers-on of the non-producing class. . . .¹⁴¹

At the same time, as Marx, too, time and again points out, under capitalism the position of the lower middle class, which includes the artist and intellectual, is extremely unstable; the members of this class are constantly being thrown down into the ranks of the workers and, thus, constitute an "intellectual proletariat." In a prophetic statement--which reminds one of the words of the late Marxist sociologist, C. Wright Mills--Morris recognizes this volatile element within society: "This intellectual proletariat, as it has been called, is one of the most disruptive elements of modern society, as it is largely in sympathy with the wage-earners, and is quick to catch up with new ideas, while the position of most of its members is worse than that of an average skilled workman."¹⁴² Furthermore, throughout his lectures, Morris calls on the artist to renounce his "middle position" and cast his lot with the workers.

Finally, capitalism is not only destroying art in the Western world, but it is having an adverse effect on the art of other countries as well. Morris is one of the first to notice the effects of imperialism on the culture of a colonial people. He argues that England is

¹⁴¹Morris, "True and False Society," Works, XXIII, 226.

¹⁴²Morris and Bax, Socialism, p. 275.

guilty of cultural imperialism as well as economic imperialism. Pursuing her colonial policy and imperialistic dreams of glory, England is destroying the native art of the people she puts in subjugation, with the result that "the conquered races in their hopelessness are everywhere giving up the genuine practice of their own art."¹⁴³

It is the vision of capitalism and its effects on art and the lives of people that makes Morris say, "The leading passion of my life has been and is hatred of modern civilization."¹⁴⁴ However, in the same article Morris claims that he is not a "mere railer against progress."¹⁴⁵ He sees some hope; in 1885 Morris writes to his friend, Fred Henderson: "Society is rotten to the core and only waits for revolution to sweep it away: in the new society only lies the hope for the Arts."¹⁴⁶ Morris' hope for society and the arts is based on his acceptance of the Marxian theory of revolution and the necessity for Socialism. In the late '70's and early '80's Morris emphasizes the need for education, saying,

¹⁴³Morris, "The Art of the People," Works, XXII, 36.

¹⁴⁴Morris, "How I Became a Socialist," Works, XXIII, 279.

¹⁴⁵Ibid., p. 280.

¹⁴⁶Morris, "Letter to Fred Henderson (28 December 1885)," in Edward Thompson, William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary, p. 881.

for example, "If we could only explain to those thoughtful men, . . . then the seed of victory might be sown,"¹⁴⁷ or, in another lecture, "Education on all sides is what we must look to."¹⁴⁸ Indeed, Morris never abandons his belief in education and the value of propaganda. However, by October 1883, scarcely six months after having read Marx's Capital, Morris writes to a friend,

Where I think I differ from you of the means whereby revolution may be attained is this: if I do not misrepresent your views, you think that individuals of good will belonging to all classes of men can, if they be numerous and strenuous enough, bring about change. I on the contrary think that the basis of all change must be, as it has always been, the antagonism of classes: I mean that though here and there a few men of the upper and middle classes, moved by their conscience and insight, may and doubtless will throw in their lot with the working classes, the upper and middle classes as a body will by the very nature of their existence, and like a plant grows, resist the abolition of classes: neither do I think that any amelioration of the condition of the poor on the only lines which the rich can go upon will advance us on the road; save that it will put more power into the hands of the lower classes and so strengthen both their discontent and their means of showing it: for I do not believe that starvelings can bring about a revolution.¹⁴⁹

The class struggle, then, is the motive force for social change; moreover, for Morris as well as for Marx, one's class is determined by his relationship to the means of

¹⁴⁷ Morris, "The Art of the People," Works, XXII, 31.

¹⁴⁸ Morris, "Art and the Beauty of the Earth," Works, XXII, 167.

¹⁴⁹ Morris, "Letter to T. C. Horsfall (25 October 1883)," Henderson, p. 190; second italics mine.

production. For example, Morris explains that "society is now divided between two classes, those who monopolize all the means of production of wealth save one; and those who possess nothing except that one, the Power of Labour."¹⁵⁰ It is the confrontation between these two classes that will generate a revolutionary conflict and ultimately bring about Communism.

There is no question that Morris accepts Marxism and its theory of revolution; Morris' conception of the mechanism of revolution is Marxian in all of its detail. Capitalism is digging its own grave; it is "that very increase in the productivity of labour, which will ruin capitalism."¹⁵¹ It will be a proletarian revolution (i.e., contra Saint Simon); Morris explains that "it is . . . impossible that the change can be made from above to below . . . it is the workers themselves that must bring about the change."¹⁵² They will be able to bring about this revolution because the very nature of capitalism and its factory system has created a united, disciplined proletariat. As Morris explains,

I have said war was the life-breath of the profit makers; in like manner, combination is the life of the workers. The working-classes or

¹⁵⁰Morris, "Dawn of a New Epoch," Works, XXIII, 125-26.

¹⁵¹Morris, "Monopoly: Or, How Labour is Robbed," Works, XXIII, 252.

¹⁵²Ibid., p. 251.

proletariat cannot even exist as a class without combination of some sort. The necessity which forced the profit-grinders to collect their men first into workshops working by the division of labour, and next into great factories worked by machinery, . . . gave birth to a distinct working-class or proletariat. . . .¹⁵³

In Socialism: Its Growth and Outcome, Morris quotes Marx on the inevitable death of capitalism: ". . . capitalist production begets with the inexorability of a law of nature its own negation. It is the negation of negation. . . . In the former case we had the expropriation of the mass of the people by a few usurpers; in the latter we have the expropriation of a few usurpers by the mass of people."¹⁵⁴

From the middle 1880's until his death, Morris accepts the Marxian interpretation of history as class conflict and the inevitability of Socialism. Like Marx, Morris sees in Chartism the beginnings of a working class movement; it differed from "mere radicalism in being a class movement." The Chartists failed to realize their goals "because they did not understand that true political freedom is impossible to people who are economically enslaved; there is no first and second in these matters, the two must go hand in hand together."¹⁵⁵ Morris is in

¹⁵³ Morris, "How We Live and How We Might Live," Works, XXIII, 11.

¹⁵⁴ Morris and Bax, Socialism, p. 267.

¹⁵⁵ Morris, "The Hope of Civilization," Works, XXIII, 71-72.

total agreement with Marx on how classes are formed and how they become conscious of their position; concerning the rise of the working class, Morris sums up his position:

. . . ever since the establishment of commercialism on the ruins of feudality, there has been growing a steady feeling on the part of the workers that they are a class dealt with as a class and . . . that as this class feeling has grown, so also has grown with it consciousness of the antagonism between their class and the class which employs it, . . . which lives by means of its [the working class] labour.¹⁵⁶

Will it be a violent revolution? Morris, like Marx, is hesitant about predicting the means by which the workers would come to power. At one point he defines revolution in the negative:

. . . it does not necessarily mean a change accompanied by riot and all kinds of violence, and cannot mean a change made mechanically and in the teeth of opinion by a group of men who have somehow managed to seize upon the executive power for the moment. . . . we use the word revolution in its etymological sense, and mean by it a change in the basis of society. . . . however, we Socialists do not at all mean by our word revolution what these worthy people mean by their word reform.¹⁵⁷

However, he is willing to accept violence if this is the only way the revolution can be idealized. In another lecture he says, "It may be that the best we can hope to see is that struggle getting sharper and bitterer day by

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 75.

¹⁵⁷ Morris, "How We Live and How We Might Live," Works, XXIII, 3.

day, until it breaks out openly at last into the slaughter of men by actual warfare instead of by the slower and crueller methods of "peaceful commerce."¹⁵⁸ One thing is certain; despite many of the later comments concerning his radicalism, Morris is adamantly opposed to Fabianism, Anarchism, and Parliamentarianism. As George Bernard Shaw recalls, "Morris heartily disliked the Fabians, not because they undervalued him, but as a species."¹⁵⁹ At the same time, Morris "would not countenance Anarchism on any terms;"¹⁶⁰ when the Socialist League came under the domination of the anarchists, Morris withdrew. Similarly, it was Morris' anti-Parliamentary stance that made him decide to withdraw from the Social Democratic Federation.¹⁶¹ Nor can Morris be considered a Utopian Socialist; in Socialism: Its Growth and Outcome, he accepts the "scientific" Socialism of Marx and Engels and carefully distinguishes it from the views of Owen, Saint-Simon, and Fourier.¹⁶² In fact, Morris' world

¹⁵⁸Morris, "Useful Work versus Useless Toil," Works, XXIII, 119.

¹⁵⁹"Morris as I Knew Him," in May Morris, Works, II, xi.

¹⁶⁰Ibid., p. xvi.

¹⁶¹See "Whigs, Democrats, and Socialists," Works, XXIII, 27-38; May Morris, "Socialism and Anarchism," Works, II, 307-66; William Morris, "The Policy of Abstention," in May Morris, Works, II, 434-52.

¹⁶²See especially Chapter XVII, "The Utopists: Owen, Saint-Simon, and Fourier."

view is consistently Marxist.

The result of the proletarian revolution will be the creation of a socialist state. For Morris, Socialism means,

. . . a condition of society in which there should be neither rich nor poor, neither master nor master's man, neither idle nor overworked, neither brain-sick brain workers, nor heart-sick hand workers, in a word, in which all men would be living in equality of condition, and would manage their affairs unwastefully, and with the full consciousness that harm to one would mean harm to all--the realization at last of the meaning of the word COMMONWEALTH.¹⁶³

The "measure which will realize a new basis of society . . . is the abolition of private ownership in the means of production."¹⁶⁴ Socialism is not opposed to Communism; on the contrary, Socialism is the necessary transitional stage to Communism:

. . . According to the first [of two views] the State--that is, the nation organized for unwasteful production and exchange of wealth--will be the sole possessor of the national plant and stock, the sole employer of labour, which she will so regulate in the general interest that no man will ever need to fear lack of employment and due earnings therefrom. . . . According to the other view, the centralized nation would give place to a federation of communities who would hold all wealth in common, and would use that wealth for satisfying the needs of each member, only exacting from each that he should do his best according to his capacity towards the production of common wealth. Of course, it is to be understood

¹⁶³ Morris, "How I Became a Socialist," Works, XXIII, 277.

¹⁶⁴ Morris, "Letter to the Rev. George Bainton (2 April 1888)," Henderson, p. 283.

that each member is absolutely free to use his share of wealth as he pleases, without interference from any, so long as he really uses it, that is, does not turn it into an instrument for the oppression of others. This view intends complete equality of condition for everyone, though life should be, as always, varied by the differences of capacity and disposition; . . . These two views of the future of society are sometimes opposed to each other as Socialism and Communism, but to my mind the latter is simply the necessary development of the former, which implies a transition period, during which people would be getting rid of the habits of mind bred by the long ages of tyranny and commercial competition, and be learning that it is to the interest of each that all should thrive.¹⁶⁵

In another lecture Morris argues that "between Socialism and Communism there is no difference whatever in my mind. Communism is in fact the completion of Socialism: when that ceases to be militant and becomes triumphant, it will be Communism."¹⁶⁶ He concludes this lecture by saying, "I do declare that any other state of society but Communism is grievous and disgraceful to all belonging to it."¹⁶⁷

With this new society will come a new morality to replace religion; it will be, as Morris describes it, a "social morality, the responsibility of man towards the life of man, will, in the new order of things, take the

¹⁶⁵Morris, "True and False Society," Works, XXIII, 235-36.

¹⁶⁶Morris, "Communism," Works, XXIII, 271.

¹⁶⁷Ibid., p. 275.

place of theological morality, or the responsibility of man to some abstract idea."¹⁶⁸ This will be possible because man will no longer be alienated from his work, from other men, or from himself. Man will "work for a livelihood, instead of working to supply the demand of the profit market--instead of working for profit."¹⁶⁹ Man, instead of being fragmented and his nature molded by the demands of an impersonal capitalist production for an impersonal market, will have the opportunity to develop all of his potentialities. Morris argues that "a man might easily learn and practice at least three crafts, varying sedentary occupation with outdoor occupation calling for the exercise of strong bodily energy for work in which the mind had more to do."¹⁷⁰ As the narrator is told in News From Nowhere, "We pass our lives in reasonable strife with nature, exercising not one side of ourselves only, but all sides, taking the keenest pleasure in all the life of the world."¹⁷¹

With everyone having the opportunity to exercise and develop to his full potentiality the division of labor will come about by choice rather than by an accident of

¹⁶⁸ Morris, "Useful Work versus Useless Toil," Works, XXIII, 112.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 110.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 112.

¹⁷¹ Morris, News From Nowhere; or, An Epoch of Rest, Works, XVI, 58.

birth. The artist will be reintegrated into society; all people will have the opportunity to create art, and art will "be common to the whole people . . . instead of . . . a luxury incidental to a certain privileged position."¹⁷² Manual and intellectual labor will be combined, or if distinguished, will be equally rewarded; Morris argues,

. . . I cannot see that any extra reward should be given to a man for following an "intellectual" calling. If he does his work in it well, it is more pleasurable to him than a "non-intellectual" one, and why should he be paid twice over? If he does it ill, let him be pulled out of it in the gentlest way possible, and learn to do what he can do. . . . he should be paid not for the "intellectual" part of his work, but for the workman's part of it; finishing up everything properly, doing everything as well as it can be done in all respects. This will take something out of him. But the exercise of his "intellect" will take nothing; it is mere play.

The long and short of it is this, a decent life, a share in the common life of all is the only "reward" that any man can honestly take for his work, whatever it is; if he asks for more, that means that he intends to play the master over somebody.¹⁷³

Art will not only be available to all, but the masses of people will be able to understand it. Under present conditions the large majority of people cannot understand the art being produced; they are corrupted by the sordid ugliness surrounding them. Morris explains,

¹⁷²Morris, "The Socialist Ideal," Works, XXIII, 260.

¹⁷³Morris, "Artist and Artisan: As an Artist Sees It," in May Morris, Works, II, 495.

"Therefore let us once for all get rid of the idea of the mass of people having an intuitive idea of Art."¹⁷⁴

Like Marx, Morris believes that man's senses are the product of historical development. For example, he argues that "the number of people of imperfect mechanical sight is increasing" and that "people have largely ceased to take in mental images through the eyes; whereas in times past the eyes were the great feeders of the fancy and imagination."¹⁷⁵ Present conditions have debased man's senses. Hence the majority of people are not in a position to respond to art, and they will never be in a condition to respond to it "unless they are in immediate connection with the great traditions of times past, and unless they are every day meeting with things that are beautiful and fit."¹⁷⁶ This state of affairs can be brought about only through social revolution. Under Communism, "both art and literature, and especially art, will appeal to the senses directly, just as the art of

¹⁷⁴Morris, "Address on the Collection of Paintings of the English Pre-Raphaelite School in the City of Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery 24 October 1891," in May Morris, Works, I, 308.

¹⁷⁵Morris, "The Society of the Future," in May Morris, Works, II, 465.

¹⁷⁶Morris, "Address on . . . the English Pre-Raphaelite School," May Morris, Works, I, 308.

the past has done."¹⁷⁷ Man will change his society, and, in the process, change himself.

Perhaps it should be mentioned that Morris does not advocate the abandonment of the machine or the other fruits of man's technological progress. Morris' criticism of machinery is based on his observation that "in spite of our inventions, no worker works under the present system an hour the less on account of those labour-saving machines, so-called."¹⁷⁸ Morris argues that man should become the master of the machine not its slave (as he now is); the machine itself is not the problem: "It is not this or that tangible steel and brass machine which we want to get rid of, but the great intangible machine of commercial tyranny, which oppresses the lives of all of us."¹⁷⁹ Looking toward the future, Morris says,

Truely we shall have a good stock [of machines] to start with, but not near enough. Some men must press on to martyrdom, and toil to invent new ones, till at last pretty nearly everything that is necessary to men will be made by machines. I don't see why it should not be done. I myself have boundless faith in their capacity. I believe machines can do everything--except make works of art.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁷Morris, "The Society of the Future," in May Morris, Works, II, 465.

¹⁷⁸Morris, "How We Live and How We Might Live," Works, XXIII, 19.

¹⁷⁹Morris, "Art and Its Producers," Works, XXII, 352.

¹⁸⁰Morris, "Art and Its Producers," Works, XXII, 166.

Machines are necessary. Technology will free man from his struggle with nature and will create one condition--leisure--necessary for the development of man's full creative potentialities.

To realize Communism, Morris is ready to acquiesce in the destruction of the art that now exists. To gain that "equality of condition" which is the basis of Socialism, Morris says, "I am prepared to accept as a consequence of the process of that gain, the seeming disappearance of what art is now left us; because I am sure that that will be but a temporary loss, to be followed by a genuine new birth of art, which will be the spontaneous expression of life innate in the whole people."¹⁸¹ Indeed, before the revolution, "civilization" will reach its lowest ebb: "the earth's surface will be hideous everywhere, save in the uninhabitable desert; Art will utterly perish, as in the manual arts so in literature, which will become, as it is indeed speedily becoming, a mere string of orderly and calculate ineptitudes and passionless ingenuities. . . ."¹⁸² Before the revolution, men will be ideologically dominated by their bourgeois masters. In a prophetic observation that sounds very much like

¹⁸¹Morris, "The Deeper Meaning of the Struggle," to the Editor of The Daily Chronicle (10 November 1893) in May Morris, Works, II, 522.

¹⁸²Morris, "The Aims of Art," Works, XXIII, 95.

Herbert Marcuse in his One-Dimensional Man, Morris writes that in a decade or so men will be

. . . living under a system of society so intricate as to look on the surface like a mere chance-hap muddle, many millions of necessitous people, oppressed indeed, and sorely, not by obvious individual violence and ill-will, but by an economic system so far reaching, so deeply seated, that it may well seem like the operation of a natural law to men so uneducated that they have not even escaped the reflexion of the so-called education of their masters, but in addition to their other mishaps are saddled also with the superstitions and hypocrisies of the upper classes, with scarce a whit of the characteristic traditions of their own class to help them: an intellectual slavery which is the necessary accompaniment of their material slavery.¹⁸³

Faced with this prospect, Morris is arguing in the early '90's that the artist must do more than produce art; he must join a movement which will create the conditions for a new art. "Our business now and for a long time," Morris explains, "will be, not so much attempting to produce definite art, as rather clearing the ground to give art its opportunity."¹⁸⁴ For Morris, things will get worse before they get better; the revolution, however, is inevitable, and, ultimately, man will create a society in which his artistic instinct will find expression.

¹⁸³Morris, "Communism," Works, XXIII, 268; italics mine. In his Victorians and the Machine, Sussman compares Morris' thought to that of Marcuse's Eros and Civilization (cf. p. 134).

¹⁸⁴Morris, "The Socialist Ideal," Works, XXIII, 262.

Like Marx and Engels, Morris has a utopian vision which is profoundly aesthetic in character. Man is living in harmony with nature and his fellow man; everything takes on aesthetic qualities. An example taken from two pages of News From Nowhere, Morris' utopian novel, is sufficient to demonstrate the point:

We went into the market-place which I had been in before, a thinnish stream of elegantly dressed people going in along with us. We turned into the cloister and came to a richly moulded and carved doorway, where a very pretty dark-haired young girl gave us each a beautiful bunch of summer flowers, and we entered a hall much bigger than that of the Hammersmith Guest House, more elaborate in its architecture and perhaps more beautiful. . . . the pretty waitresses came to us smiling, and chattering sweetly like reed warblers by the riverside, and fell to giving us our dinner. As to this, as at our breakfast, everything was cooked and served with a daintiness which showed that those who had prepared it were interested in it; but there was no excess either of quantity or of gourmandise; everything was simple, though so excellent of its kind; and it was made clear to us that this was no feast, only an ordinary meal. The glass, crockery, and plate were very beautiful to my eyes, used to the study of mediaeval art; but a nineteenth century club-haunter would, I daresay, have found them rough and lacking in finish; the crockery being lead-glazed pot-ware, though beautifully ornamented; . . . The glass, again, though elegant and quaint, and very varied in form, was somewhat bubbled and hornier in texture than the commercial articles of the nineteenth century. The furniture and general fittings of the hall were much of a piece with the table-gear, beautiful in form and highly ornamented, but without the commercial "finish" of the joiners and cabinet-makers of our time. Withal, there was a total absence of what the nineteenth century calls "comfort"--that is, stuffy inconvenience; so that even apart from the delightful excitement of the day, I had never eaten my dinner so pleasantly before.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁵ Morris, News From Nowhere, Works, XVI, 100-101.

In this society, Professor Sussman argues, "the machine can be both beautiful and useful because it is placed in a society where values have been radically altered, where the end of social life is not production but what Herbert Marcuse in Eros and Civilization calls 'play,' 'the play of life itself, beyond want and external compulsion--the manifestation of an existence without fear and anxiety.'"¹⁸⁶ Hammond, one of the narrator's guides in News From Nowhere, recalls that after the revolution, "art or work--pleasure, as one ought to call it, . . . sprung up almost spontaneously, it seems, from a kind of instinct amongst people no longer driven desperately to painful and terrible overwork. . . ." ¹⁸⁷ Arnot claims that Morris' utopian society compares favorably to Marx's vision of the "higher phase of communism," and that much of News From Nowhere "answers to the indications given by Marx in his notes on the 'Gotha Programme.'" ¹⁸⁸ It should not be surprising, then, that Marx's close friend, Karl Liebknecht, translated News From Nowhere and was circulating it in Russia before the Revolution. ¹⁸⁹ With Morris, as with Marx, the demand for

¹⁸⁶ Sussman, Victorians and the Machine, p. 134.

¹⁸⁷ Morris, News From Nowhere, Works, XVI, 134.

¹⁸⁸ Arnot, Morris: The Man and the Myth, pp. 116-17.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 114.

an aesthetically satisfying life is a demand for a revolutionary change in the basis of society.

Morris' Literary Tastes and
His Literary Criticism

Morris will not be remembered for his role as a literary critic nor for any of his judgments on specific works of literature. Morris never thought of himself as a literary critic and, as a general rule, had little use for literary criticism. Concerning the professional critic, Mackail quotes him as saying, "To think of a beggar making a living by selling his opinion about other people . . . and fancy any one paying for it!"¹⁹⁰ George Bernard Shaw writes, "Morris was a practitioner in the arts and neither a professor of literature nor an avowed critic. Literary criticism was for him a side line open to any writer whose five senses were intact; but in art a man was what he was and did what he could; and what was the use of arguing about it?"¹⁹¹ In 1877 Morris was offered a chair of poetry at Oxford; he declined the position saying,

It seems to me that the practice of any art rather narrows the artist in regard to the theory of it; and I think I come more than most men under this condemnation, so that though I have read a good deal and have a good memory, my knowledge is

¹⁹⁰ Mackail, The Life of William Morris, I, 138.

¹⁹¹ "Morris As I Knew Him," May Morris, Works, II, xxxiii.

so limited and so ill-arranged that I can scarce call myself a man of letters; and moreover I have a peculiar inaptitude for expressing myself except in the one way my gift lies. Also, may I say without offense that I have a lurking doubt as to whether the Chair of Poetry is more than an ornamental one, and whether the Professor of a wholly incommunicable art is not rather in a false position; nevertheless I would like to see a good man filling it, and, if the critics will forgive me, somebody who is not only a critic.¹⁹²

When his friend, Fred Henderson, sent Morris some poetry to criticize, Morris accepted the task only because Henderson was a "friend since I have made it a rule to decline to criticize poetry sent me, because I don't think it fair that a man who is practising the art himself should be burdened with the responsibility of sitting in judgment on his fellow workmen."¹⁹³ Like those of Marx and Engels, Morris' literary tastes and his literary criticism are, for the most part, instinctive; he seems satisfied that he is "something of an anti-intellectual, making no effort to disguise his own prejudice."¹⁹⁴ As Paul Thompson puts it, "Morris' attitude to literature shares none of the theoretical importance of his views on the arts."¹⁹⁵

¹⁹²Mackail, I, 347.

¹⁹³Cited in Edward Thompson, "Appendix III: Five Letters to Fred Henderson (Alderman J. F. Henderson, J. P., of Norwich), p. 875.

¹⁹⁴Paul Thompson, The Work of William Morris, p. 147.

¹⁹⁵Ibid., p. 146.

In 1885 the Pall Mall Gazette published Morris' contribution to Sir John Lubbock's list of the Best Hundred Books. Morris explains that his list is in no way an attempt to "prescribe reading for other people; the list I give you is of books which have profoundly impressed myself."¹⁹⁶ Morris' list contains fifty-four titles and displays a curious mixture of traditionalism and eccentricity. He has a high regard for the Hebrew Bible, Homer, Hesiod, the Edda, Beowulf, and collections of folk tales, saying that, "they cannot always be measured by a literary standard, but to me are far more important than any literature. They are in no sense the work of individuals, but have grown up from the very hearts of the people."¹⁹⁷ As it does when he speaks of the visual arts, Morris' criterion here is based on his conception of a Democracy of Art, art that is produced for and understood by all people. Although he includes such ancients as Herodotus, Plato, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Aristophanes, and Catullus, Morris has little use for the classics, saying, "The greater part of the Latins I should call sham classics. . . . I suspect superstition and authority have influenced our estimate of them till it has

¹⁹⁶ May Morris, "Introduction," to William Morris, Collected Works, XXII, xii.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., p. xiii.

become a matter of convention."¹⁹⁸ Over one-fourth of the list is devoted to medieval poetry and prose with no explanation as to its quality or the basis for its selection; it is a blanket endorsement and includes everything from Dante to Chaucer to Renard the Fox. Morris' list of "modern" poets begins with Shakespeare and includes Blake, Coleridge, Shelley, Keats, and Byron. As an explanation for leaving out Milton, Morris remarks, ". . . the union in his works of cold classicalism with Puritanism (the two things which I hate most in the world) repels me so that I cannot read him."¹⁹⁹ His list includes no contemporary poets and only a few novelists (e.g., Scott, Dumas the elder, Hugo); of the novelists he writes, "I should like to say here that I yield to no one, not even Ruskin, in my love and admiration for Scott; also that to my mind of the novelists of our generation Dickens is immeasurably ahead."²⁰⁰ Under books which he says he cannot classify, Morris lists More's Utopia, Ruskin's Works, and Carlyle's Works. Since Morris had already read Marx's Capital, one may wonder why it is not included. Morris explains that there are books which should be considered "tools" rather than works of art; among such books Morris includes "works on philosophy,

¹⁹⁸ Morris, loc. cit.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., p. xv.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., p. xvj.

economics, and modern or critical history," and he adds, "I by no means intend to undervalue such books, but they are not, to my mind, works of art."²⁰¹ In sum, the list reveals Morris' wide range of reading, but it gives few clues to his basic assumptions about literature.

However, it seems to me that most of his choices can be explained by viewing them in light of his general theory of art. His love for folk literature, the Bible, Homer, and medieval prose and poetry is based on his belief that this literature was an expression of the life of a whole people, that it has a broad social base both in its production and its consumption. Furthermore, just as one's appreciation of a work grows with understanding, Morris' intense study of the past, particularly the Middle Ages, increased his appreciation of its products.

His view of the poetry of his own period is, I think, based partly on his belief that the language of his own time is degraded. As Paul Thompson argues, "He likes very little poetry written after 1855; . . . He thought that simple language and direct emotion had been the secret of the great poetry of the past. But things had 'very much changed since the early days of language: once everybody who could express himself at all did so beautifully, was a poet for that occasion, because all

²⁰¹Ibid., p. xij.

language was beautiful. But now language is utterly degraded in our daily lives, and poets have to make a new tongue each for himself."²⁰² Another reason for his criticism of modern poetry was his belief that it was losing touch with the people and with the concrete facts of daily existence. As early as 1870, while discussing Dante Gabriel Rossetti's poetry, Morris touches on the "mysticism of thought, which in some form and degree is not wanting . . . to any poet of the modern school."²⁰³ Further, he praises Rossetti for not losing himself "amid allegory or abstractions" and "turning human life into symbols."²⁰⁴ He insists over and over again that the poet must be concrete and keep his work rooted in the concrete facts of life. He criticizes Swinburne's Tristram of Lyonesse for being "founded on literature, not on nature." He argues,

. . . in these days when all the arts, even poetry, are like to be overwhelmed under the mass of material riches which civilization has made and is making more and more hastily every day; riches which the world has made indeed, but cannot use to any good purpose: in these days the issue between art, that is, the godlike part of man, and mere beastiality, is so momentous, and the

²⁰² Paul Thompson, The Work of William Morris, p. 148.

²⁰³ Morris, "Review of Dante Gabriel Rossetti's Poems," for The Academy (14 May 1870) in May Morris, Works, I, 101.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., pp. 101-02.

surroundings of life are so stern and unplayful, that nothing can take serious hold of people, or should do so, but that which is rooted deepest in reality and is quite first hand; there is no room for anything which is not forced out of man or deep feeling, because of its innate strength and vision.²⁰⁵

What Morris seems to be fighting against in the movement in poetry that began with the aesthetes and culminated in the fin de siecle poets of the '80's and '90's, a movement that sought to escape from the ugliness of bourgeois society by creating another world, a hazy rarified world of art open only to an initiated few. Morris would have none of it.

In literature as well as the other arts, Morris advocates works that appeal "to the senses directly" and that have an epic quality about them. In one of his lectures he outlines his criteria:

For I suppose the best art to be the pictured representation of men's imaginings; what they have thought has happened to the world before their time, or what they deem they have seen with the eyes of the body or the soul: and the imaginings thus represented are always beautiful indeed, but oftenest stifling to men's passions and aspirations, and not seldom sorrowful or even horrible.

Stories that tell of men's aspirations for more than material life can give them, their struggles for the future welfare of their race, their unselfish love, their unrequited service: things like this are the subjects for the best art; in such subjects there is hope surely, yet the aspect of them is likely to be sorrowful enough: defeat the seed of victory, and death the seed of life, will be shown on the face of them.

²⁰⁵ Morris, "Letter to Mrs. Burne-Jones (1882)," Henderson, p. 158.

Take note too that in the best art all these solemn and awful things are expressed clearly and without vagueness, with such life and power that they impress the beholder so deeply that he is brought face to face with the very scenes, and lives among them for a time; so raising this life above the daily tangle of small things that wearies him, to the level of the heroic which they represent.²⁰⁶

At the same time, it is obvious that Morris' emphasis on concreteness in literature is not the same as realism or naturalism. Speaking of Morris' Pilgrims of Hope, Edward Thompson observes that "Morris still clung to his Pre-Raphaelite view that art, by definition, must be 'a thing of beauty,' and that beauty and realism in the nineteenth century must be incompatible."²⁰⁷ This applies to both art and literature. As Morris argues,

When an artist has really a very keen sense of beauty, I venture to think that he cannot literally represent an event that takes place in modern life. He must add something or another to qualify or soften the ugliness and sordidness of the surroundings of life in our generation. That is not only the case with pictures, if you please; it is the case also in literature. . . . Well, of course, Art is free to everybody, and by all means, if anyone is really moved by the spirit to treat modern subjects, let him do so, and do it in the best way he can; but, on the other hand, I don't think he has a right, under the circumstances and considering the evasions he is absolutely bound to make, to lay any blame on his brother artist who turns back again to the life of past times, or who, shall we rather say, since his imagination must have some garb or another, naturally takes the

²⁰⁶ Morris, "Some Hints on Pattern-Designing," Works, XXII, 176.

²⁰⁷ Edward Thompson, William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary, p. 780.

raiment of some period in which the surroundings of life were not ugly but beautiful.²⁰⁸

Morris read the realists--Balzac, Tolstoy, and Turgeniev--Zola's Germinal, and Henry James (whom he detested), and while recognizing their virtues could not enjoy them. For one thing, he simply could not see the significance in detailing the lives of the middle class. Morris is more interested in novelists such as Twain, whom he compares with Homer and Shakespeare, and Dickens. Dickens will be remembered, according to Morris, not for his realism but for his imagination. Morris writes,

I have often thought with a joyful chuckle how puzzling, nay, inexplicable to the generation of freedom, will be the those curious specimens of human ingenuity called novels now produced, and which present with such faithful detail the lives of the middle-classes, all below them being ignored except as so many stage accessories; amongst them all, perhaps Dickens will still be remembered; and that because of what is now imputed to him as a fault, his fashioning a fantastic and unreal world for his men and women to act in. Surely here again all will be changed, and our literature will sympathize with the earlier works of men's imaginations before they learned to spin out their sickly feelings and futile speculations; when they left us clear pictures of living things, alive then and for ever. We shall not desire and we shall not be able to carry on the feverish and perverted follies of the art and literature of commercialism.²⁰⁹

By the same token, Morris' views on realism in the drama are similar to his views on poetry and fiction. He wants

²⁰⁸ Morris, "Address on . . . the English Pre-Raphaelite School," May Morris, Works, I, 304-05.

²⁰⁹ Morris, "Commonweal Notes," in May Morris, Works, II, 306.

the theater to be more symbolic, "not realistic; scenes and costumes should be represented by simple conventional symbols, and actors should wear masks 'to simplify and detach the persons of the drama.'"²¹⁰ This attitude shows itself in Morris' reaction to Ibsen. While many of his friends--Shaw, Engels, and Eleanor Marx--were some of the very first to recognize Ibsen's greatness, and while he praises Ibsen's Doll's House as "'a piece of truth about modern society, clearly and forcibly put,'"²¹¹ Morris is unenthusiastic and unmoved.

From a Marxian point of view, Morris' lack of appreciation and understanding of the theory and function of realism constitutes the weakest element in his literary criticism, and his criticism of art in general. As one critic remarks, "He failed to see that social realism might be transformed by political hope; that the conventional Victorian view that literature should have a moral purpose, which he had rejected when that purpose was conventional moralizing, might lead in a new context to great writing making its own contribution to change."²¹²

²¹⁰ Paul Thompson, The Work of William Morris, p. 150. Interestingly enough, Morris' only drama, The Table Turned; or Nupkins Awakened, while dealing with contemporary issues--social justice and the socialist revolution--is highly artificial. It reminds one of Shaw, which may explain why Shaw praised it so highly.

²¹¹ Edward Thompson, Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary, p. 766.

²¹² Paul Thompson, The Work of William Morris, p. 151.

It is a curious blind spot. It appears as if Morris does not see the value of negative thinking. That is to say, he does not see the value in depicting things as they are, in all their beauty and ugliness, as a way of protesting against existing conditions. For Marx, to depict things as they are is revolutionary; to see and comprehend "reality" is to change consciousness, to undercut ideology and to provide the possibility of revolutionary change. In the contrast between what is and what ought to be, Morris rejects this dialectic. The artist's task is to create beauty, to create such beauty as to motivate men to strive to make it a part of their everyday existence. This, too, has its revolutionary aspect. Speaking of Morris' own work, Holbrook Jackson argues, "Always busy in the visible world, he was still busier in the Utopia of his fancy. The beautiful things he made were imported to this world from that Utopia, and their very importation was an act of propaganda. . . . Everything he created was a lure to Utopia, an invitation to follow him into a new world."²¹³

Conclusion

William Morris is the first English artist of major importance to view art and its relationship to

²¹³Holbrook Jackson, The Eighteen Nineties: A Review of the Art and Ideas at the Close of the Nineteenth Century (1913; rpt. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1966), p. 248.

society from the standpoint of Marxism. He establishes a new direction in English aesthetics that is to have important consequences in the development of aesthetic theory and literary criticism. After Morris, no important aesthetician or literary theorist could ignore the implications that Marxism has for discussing the relationship between art and society. As Professor Kocmanova explains,

This remarkably consistent body of considered opinion is the final gift of William Morris to posterity. Only when we contrast it with the almost complete lack in England of his day of any other attempt to assess the importance and nature of art from the Marxist position, can we begin to estimate the significance of his undertaking and the influence his carefully formulated ideas have had on the subsequent development of aesthetic theory.²¹⁴

Beginning with Morris, Marxism has become a major conceptual method for English literary criticism; although many critics and literary theorists do not subscribe to its world view or its methods, any literary theory which pretends to be complete must come to grips with Marxism.

Morris begins this encounter. From Marx he takes the position that man's economic activity--his mode of labor--forms the basis of society. Man's mode of production determines the form and content of his social relationships (expressed as class relationships), and, hence, his view of reality, which, in turn, are reflected

²¹⁴Jessie Kocmanova, "The Aesthetic Opinions of William Morris," 411.

in society's ideological superstructure, its "morals, laws, religion," and art, the Weltanschauung of the period. In this assumption, Morris is even more deterministic than Marx. From his writings, it appears as if Morris believes that art is almost totally dependent on society's socio-economic processes. Edward Thompson is correct when he points out that Morris "saw man's economic and social development always as the master-process, and tended to suggest that the arts were passively dependent upon social change."²¹⁵ As has been noted, Morris predicted that under capitalism "art will utterly perish,"²¹⁶ Indeed must die, in order to be reborn in a communistic society. Morris does not see the other side of the dialectic. While he emphasizes the communicative element in art (e.g., in his discussion of poetry in his letters to Fred Henderson) and the idea that the poet can "compel" others to feel as he does, he does not explicitly associate this change in consciousness with action. At times he seems to be saying that the creation of "beauty" will create a demand for more beauty; moreover, since this creation of beauty is bound-up with the condition of labor, this demand will be revolutionary in its consequences. Furthermore, Morris obviously understands the value of propaganda; for example, one of his motives in

²¹⁵Edward Thompson, p. 770.

²¹⁶Morris, "The Aims of Art," Works, XXIII, 95.

creating the utopian vision in News From Nowhere is to motivate people to want Communism.²¹⁷ However, he often seems to be urging the artist to abandon art, and to join the "Cause," to create the conditions necessary for art. He never articulates, in any systematic way, how art qua art can change consciousness and structure social action. He seldom focuses on the ideological role of the artist and the work of art; he does not appear conscious of the possibility of the artist as an agent or art as an instrument in social change.

Morris, like Ruskin (and like Marx), seeks to locate the artist and his creations in society and the everyday experiences of man. Although at times he seems to attribute special gifts to the poet--i.e., that a poet is born not made--he is constantly arguing that in times past art was produced by "common fellows." For example, he sees nothing unique in artistic "inspiration"; he says, ". . . [inspiration] means the hope and fruition of pleasure which fills a man as he receives from the minds of those who came before him to give to his fellows now living and to those that shall live."²¹⁸ His emphasis is on the act

²¹⁷ Cf. May Morris, Works, I, 504.

²¹⁸ Morris, "Art and the People," May Morris, Works, II, 394.

of communication as the essential quality of an artist or writer rather than on any particular quality of "genius." Moreover, going beyond Ruskin, Morris begins to analyze the position of the artist and writer from the standpoint of class--a particularly Marxian perspective. He notes that many artists are working for the bourgeois, and others are merely "hangers-on." At the same time, like Marx, he recognizes the instability of this group and the possibility that they may "desert their own standpoint to place themselves at that of the proletariat."²¹⁹ Morris does not develop this line of thought in any systematic detail, nor does he concern himself with the possibility of employing this observation--i.e., the class position of the artist--in his analysis of the relationship between the artist, his work, and society. Although he is extremely conscious of the existence of class conflict and believes that the class position of the worker excludes him from the creation and experience of art, he does not apply (except perhaps in an unconscious way in his comments on the novel) this concept of class to the analysis of specific works of art. He overlooks what was to become in the hands of other Marxist critics one of the dominant assumptions of Marxian

²¹⁹ Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, Manifesto of the Communist Party in Selected Works, p. 44.

methodology--the belief that the class position of the artist profoundly influences the form and content of his work, that the "reality" he encounters and attempts to come to terms with is affected by his class position, which, in turn, is "reflected" in his creations.

In most of Morris' work there is a lack of logical and systematic development of ideas which are supported by specific, concrete examples. One is continually disappointed if he is seeking rigorous and precise definitions that will serve as a basis of further development. His categories are often so broad and their limits so hazy that it is almost impossible to discover what they include or exclude. For example, when he asserts that art is "man's expression of joy in his labour," one is never quite certain what "labour" includes, whether it includes just his concept of "useful work" and excludes his idea of "useless toil," or whether it includes both. Morris obviously believes that work constitutes man's physical and emotional faculties, but one is never given a detailed analysis of that act or of the relationship between the producer and his product or the product and its audience. His words of praise--"fit," "manly," "beautiful," "joy," "fair," "decent," "useful," "harmony," "reasonable," "simple," etc.--as well as his words of condemnation are invariably open to several interpretations. Morris asserts, he does not attempt to convince

by logical argument; he persuades by an appeal to common sense and by the sheer force of his assertions. Again, it is the argument of a visionary and prophet rather than that of a social scientist or philosopher. He moves his audience with rhetoric rather than winning them through careful analysis and demonstration. This is not to deny the originality and power of Morris' work; rather it is to argue that his intelligence is of a different order. He is simply not interested in abstract theory; he thinks as a practicing artist and as a man whose whole being is involved in the crucial social questions of his day. The artistic side of Morris and his love for the concrete prevent him from appreciating theory, and, at the same time, stop him from becoming too abstract. Morris deals with the opponents of Socialism in much the same manner as Dr. Johnson handles Bishop Berkeley's assertion of the non-existence of matter, kicking a large stone and saying, "I refute it thus."

In this approach lies both Morris' strength and weakness. He takes a substantial amount of Marxist doctrine and attempts to integrate it with his own world view, which is essentially aesthetic and Romantic in nature. In this effort he is very close to Marx and Engels who attempt to do much the same sort of thing. What Morris does not see in Marxism is its essentially "critical" nature, its critical self-consciousness. Marx

and Engels inherit this critical self-consciousness and dialectical thinking from Hegel and Feuerbach; not only do they see history and the social process developing dialectically from internal contradictions, but they use the concept of the dialectic as a method for interpretation of human action, history, socio-economic process, politics, religion, philosophy, and art. Morris has little or no use for discussion of methodology; as he says, "A man does what he can, what's the use of talking about it?" Now this attitude might not hurt the practicing artist, but it is not much help to the critic whose interpretations must always--theoretically at least--stand or fall by his methodology. Responsible critics must be able to answer the question, "How do you know what you say you know?"

On the other hand, despite his lack of interest in methodology, Morris, in some respects, remains closer to Marx and Engels than many of their later interpreters. Morris, like Marx, is more interested in the creative act itself and its effects on the artist and the audience than he is in trying to define the form and content of particular works. He defines art in terms of man's praxis. He is less concerned with the epistemological implications of art. He is not burdened with the task of trying to judge a painting or a novel in terms of its accurate "reflection" of reality. His focus is on

the effect of form and content in art, rather than whether or not the work is "true." Indeed, in his criticism of Hardy and Dickens, Morris rejects "realism"--if by "realism" one means a scrupulous fidelity to Nature--and emphasizes the artist's imaginative vision. He is not trapped in the lock-step characteristic of some later Marxist critics who feel obliged to condemn a work on the grounds that it does not present a "true" picture of reality, the reality having been decided in advance as Marxist "reality."

Among those who have attempted to unite aesthetics and social radicalism, William Morris continues to be enormously influential.²²⁰ The general reasons for Morris' continuing importance seem to me to be best summed up by Edward Thompson:

First, he was one of the earliest and remains one of the most original and creative thinkers within the Marxist tradition in England. Second, he was a pioneer of constructive thought as to the organization and manifestation of social life within Communist society. . . . He understood that the consummation of his own romantic aspirations in the Socialist cause symbolized a historical consummation of vast significance.²²¹

In terms of the development of English literary theory, Morris is the first to introduce many basic Marxian

²²⁰ Cf. Donald Egbert, "The Continuing Influence of William Morris," Chapter IX of Social Radicalism and the Arts, pp. 472-91.

²²¹ Edward Thompson, Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary, pp. 790, 839.

concepts and much Marxian terminology into English aesthetics. Much of the Marxist criticism that follows is a drawing out of the implications of these concepts and this terminology and an attempt to fashion from them a Marxist methodology.

CHAPTER IV

THE THIRTIES:

THE EMERGENCE OF MARXIST LITERARY CRITICISM

During the almost forty years following Morris' death, English Marxist aesthetics and criticism remained on the periphery of the various literary movements and the discussions of critical theory. Certainly, from a Marxian perspective, this situation is not surprising. As Marx and Engels first suggested in The German Ideology, the ruling ideas of a period are the ideas of the ruling class; the class that has control of the production and communication of ideas will create the dominant ideology to justify and perpetuate its rule. It follows, then, that a Marxian world view will become dominant only when the Marxian vision of the future is realized in concrete social relationships, and this will involve much more than a victory of one set of ideas over another. The ruling class, in the forty year period under discussion, was the bourgeois.

This is not to say that the ruling ideology is all-pervading or to imply that it can completely stifle all opposition. As Lefebvre argues in his comments on ideology, man's creative praxis continually undercuts all

ideologies. Action is always moving into a future, encountering the new, and sooner or later all ideological forms must be modified to come to terms with changed circumstances. In action, man changes himself and nature, and, inevitably, all ideologies must either adjust to these changes or be discarded and replaced by one more suitable. For the most part, the prevailing ideology of ruling myth needs only minor adjustments; at times, however, especially when it is apparent that there is a massive contradiction between the prevailing ideology and man's experience, a "crisis" of faith or belief emerges, and the dominant ideology faces strong opposition from other competing world views. Indeed, one can argue that from about 1850 to the present, the Western world has been experiencing such a crisis, and no ideology as yet has been successful in resolving the major contradictions which precipitated it.

It is not within the scope of this paper to examine in detail why Marxist ideology was not very successful in England. Many explanations have been offered, none of them entirely satisfactory. However, there were some important developments. For the purposes of understanding the development of Marxist literary theory and particularly the work of Christopher Caudwell, some of the major social and intellectual trends of this period should be noted. The focus will be on the events and ideas that are

particularly relevant to Marxism as a world view as it pertains to literary theory and literary criticism. That is to say, the political, socio-economic history and the relationship of the revolutionary Socialist movement to Fabianism, Liberalism, and the growth of the Labour Party, while important, are not the immediate concerns of this study.

Again, from a Marxian perspective, the first and probably most significant point is that the social origins and social class of the great majority of critics and writers and their audiences were middle, upper-middle, and upper class. Malcolm Bradbury observes that "although the audience for the written word has expanded vastly in the last 150 years, the culture-makers have come from a much narrower social range."¹ In addition he points out that from 1900 to 1945 practically all writers--primarily poets, novelists, or dramatists--"were substantially drawn from the middle and upper classes of society."² Moreover, as one historian explains, "a large body of alienated, discontented intellectuals has never existed in Great Britain. For the most part intellectuals have been solidly middle class, forming a staunch pillar of the

¹Malcolm Bradbury, The Social Context of Modern English Literature (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971), p. 137.

²Ibid., p. 138.

status quo."³ Thus the bourgeois controlled the production and distribution of literature and literary criticism. One can safely say that until the end of World War II, there were very few writers and critics of working class origins, and what there were were not widely read.

Among the middle and upper classes, William Morris appeared as an isolated figure who was attacked in the popular press⁴ as a muddle-headed idealist and eccentric. Continually there was an attempt to distinguish between Morris and the artist and Morris the revolutionary Socialist. Indeed, in the period between 1880 and 1920, the most influential newspapers waged a vigorous campaign against all forms of radicalism. If one were not acquainted first hand with the Socialists, he had only to turn to the Times to get news of the latest "atrocities" committed by revolutionaries. It is doubtful whether the press made any meaningful distinctions between the activities of the Communists, Nihilists, Anarchists, or Syndicalists. In any case, it is clear that the newspapers portrayed these movements and their leaders as subversive and dangerous to the entire structure of society. In addition, as one scholar points out, the newspapers also

³ Neal Wood, Communism and the British Intellectuals (London: Victor Gollancz, 1959), p. 28.

⁴ Thompson, William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary, pp. 359, 369.

carried lurid tales of radical movements on the Continent. As early as 1885, readers "could not doubt that revolutionaries were active in every corner of Europe."⁵ Later in the Twenties, the fear of Communist Russia and the possibility of a Socialist revolution in Britain (e.g., the General Strike of 1926) were reflected in the majority of the press, which conducted a strong anti-Red campaign. If one uses the Spanish Civil War as a touchstone to discover where the sympathies of the major news dailies were located, he may be surprised by what he finds. As one scholar observes,

The Spanish Civil War gave an indication of the extent of the support for fascism. Of the press, the Morning Post, the Daily Mail, the Daily Sketch and the Observer were pro-Franco and printed no news from Spain that did not discredit "the Reds." The Daily Express and Daily Mirror had republican sympathies but thought nothing should be done to provoke Axis powers. The Daily Telegraph and The Times set out to be impartial, but The Times would not publish articles from their military correspondent which pointed out the dangers to the British Empire of a Spain friendly to the Axis powers.⁶

⁵W. H. Tilley, The Background of the Princess Casamassima. University of Florida Monograph: Humanities, No. 5 (Gainesville, Fla.: University of Florida Press, 1960), p. 25. Professor Tilley has written an excellent account of the role of the Times in creating the stereotype of the revolutionary.

⁶John R. Harrison, The Reactionaries: Yeats, Lewis, Pound, Eliot, Lawrence: A Study of the Anti-Democratic Intelligensia (New York: Schocken Books, 1967), p. 35. See also Katharine B. Hoskins, Today the Struggle: Literature and Politics in England During the Spanish Civil War (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1969), pp. 3-21.

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general theory) signified a radical departure from the framework of classical physics. Max Planck's quantum theory (the hypothesis of energy radiation as finite and discontinuous) disturbed the scientific belief in the order and continuity of natural processes; the formulation of the principle of uncertainty by Heisenburg in 1927 declared the impossibility of complete causal determination of the future on the basis of present measurement (i.e., every intervention to make a measurement, to study what was going on in the atomic world, creates a new, unique, not fully predictable situation). All of these developments culminated in the disturbing realization that man is at once an actor and a spectator in the drama of existence, and that the "objective" scientific image of reality, instead of being a faithful photographic reproduction of an independent reality "out there," was more like a painting, which could communicate a "likeness" but could never produce a replica. In his Physics and Philosophy (1946), Sir James Jeans summed up the effects of these scientific discoveries:

- (a) The uniformity of nature disappears.
- (b) Exact knowledge of the outer world becomes impossible.
- (c) The processes of nature cannot be adequately represented within the framework of space and time.
- (d) A sharp division between the subject and the object is no longer tenable.

- (e) Causality has lost its meaning.
- (f) If there is a fundamental causal law, it exists beyond the phenomenal world, and, hence, beyond man's powers of inspection.

Like Kant's Ding-an-sich, the universe will forever elude man's grasp, and what is left but ambiguity and skepticism?

Paralleling and complementing this new scientific world picture was the rise of analytical philosophy. If natural science was unable to furnish man with any absolute knowledge about the universe, what absolutes could philosophy put forth? The answer is none. From about 1920 onwards, the major movement in philosophy was away from the search for wisdom and absolutes. Through the work of the Vienna Circle, which included Schlick, Carnap, Neurath, and Wittgenstein, it was argued that the main task of philosophy was to rescue science. Instead of metaphysics, aesthetics, or axiology, the basic work of philosophy was to become the logic of science and a clarification of scientific terminology and concepts. Wittgenstein, whose Tractatus-Logico-Philosophicus was published in 1921, went to Cambridge and joined Bertrand Russell. Russell had already been arguing that philosophy should concentrate on the reduction and analysis of propositions (verbal and mathematical) and avoid metaphysical speculation. In England, this line of thought perhaps reaches its culminating point in the logical-positivism of A. J. Ayer's Language, Truth, and Logic

(1936) which argued that "no problems exist . . . except the factual ones of science. All other problems can be shown by linguistic analysis to be nonexistent, pseudo-problems. Most of the things philosophers and theologians and moralists had been worrying about through the centuries--God, freedom, spirit, purpose, morals, etc.--were complete wastes of time."⁸

Central to these developments in science and analytical philosophy and extremely important for the development of literary theory and criticism was the increased focus on the irrational side of man's nature. Not only was nature objectively incomprehensible because of the interference of the knower, but the whole rational-empirical tradition was called into question: the rational processes themselves came under serious scrutiny. Nietzsche, with his Apollonian-Dionysian polarity, exalted the creative power of the irrational and anticipated Freud's ideas concerning the nature of the unconscious. H. Stuart Hughes writes that in the years 1890-1930 "the problem of consciousness early established itself as crucial. . . . Unquestionably the major intellectual innovators of the 1890's were profoundly interested in the problem of irrational motivation in human conduct. They were obsessed, almost intoxicated with the

⁸Stromberg, p. 385.

rediscovery of the nonlogical, the uncivilized, the inexplicable."⁹ Freud, whose early works were translated into English around 1910, and his student Carl Jung, argued that the intellect is controlled by mysterious forces hidden in the subconscious mind. Bergson convinced many--T. E. Hulme among others--that analysis and reason could not give an adequate account of the world. Graham Wallas in his Human Nature in Politics (1908) found that the most significant political fallacy in modern political thought was its assumption that man was rational. George Sorel, Vilfredo Pareto, Gaetano Mosca, and Robert Michels all studied the non-logical and emotional side of politics, which in Pareto, Mosca, and Michels evolved into "their insistence on the sharp separation between rulers and ruled, on the necessary role of force and fraud in government and the inevitable degeneration of all political groups and institutions."¹⁰

The writing and the study of literature became at this time a very serious activity, possibly the most significant activity that was available to man. Because of the doubts cast on scientific "truth" men turned for answers to literature. I. A. Richards suggested in Science and Poetry (1926) and in Principles of Literary Criticism (1924) that science could not give an account of the world

⁹ Hughes, pp. 15, 35.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 253.

which was at once intellectually and emotionally satisfying, and that at the same time, few could put their faith in a pre-scientific world view (e.g., religion or mythology); however, poetry could give an emotionally satisfying chart of the world and would not muddle the situation by claiming the status of scientific statement. Poetry became "pseudo-statement." In imaginative literature, Eliot, Yeats, and particularly Lawrence offered a real challenge to modern science which has not been totally refuted to this day (e.g., the Snow-Leavis controversy).

Complementing Richards' argument from another direction was Hulme's assertion--based on Bergson's philosophy--that there was another order of reality which could only be grasped intuitively. This "'flux of interpenetrated elements unseizable by the intellect,'"¹¹ is "'indescribable but not unknowable.' The artist knows it; it is his Image. It is finite; hence the need for precision. Its meaning is the same thing as its form, and the artist is absolved from participation with the discursive powers of the intellect." Professor Kermode argues,

It is a revised form of the old proclamation that poetry has special access to truth, and is not merely

¹¹Cited in Frank Kermode, The Romantic Image (1957 rpt. New York: Vintage, 1964), p. 128.

light entertainment for minds tired out by physics. Poets, excluded from action, are enabled to achieve the special form of cognition and pierce the veil and intuit truth; this is communicated in the Image.¹²

One of the major consequences of these developments was, as Professor Bradbury explains,

Art now ceased to be a ritualization of the known world and a distillation of experience universally recognizable; it became a distinctive and special form of knowing that was, nonetheless, held to be central to the onward needs of society. The imaginative became a creative and reconciling principle which afforded, by wide agreement, supreme faculties for apprehending truth; the artist was, as Sir Isiah Berlin puts it, "the highest manifestation of the ever-active spirit" and he existed above and beyond the classes in a state of imaginative disinterestedness.¹³

Simultaneously, however, along with the further refinement of the elitist theories of Pareto, Mosca, and Michels, there was a further reinforcement (begun with the Aesthetic and Symbolist movements and the doctrine of art for art's sake) of the anti-democratic and elitist conception of art--a continuation of the same movement which William Morris had so totally rejected and fought against. If art was as important as science and religion, how could it be entrusted to the masses? It was safer in the hands of the initiated. Among the intelligensia there was a growing feeling that the kind of Democracy of Art advocated by William Morris would destroy cultural standards. Works such as Ortega y Gasset's Revolt of the Masses

¹²Kermode, pp. 129-30.

¹³Bradbury, p. 112.

(1930) and J. C. Powys' The Meaning of Culture (1930) asserted the fear that cultural standards would be destroyed by democracy. As early as 1914, William James observed in The Younger Generation that he detected democratic ideals in the works of H. G. Wells and argued that a political bias had a direct consequence on literary style.¹⁴

Similarly, F. R. Leavis (New Bearings in English Poetry [1932] and Mass Civilization and Minority Culture [1930]), and his wife, Q. D. Leavis (Fiction and the Reading Public [1932]), reacted against a social structure which they saw as being degraded by a mechanical mass civilization. Like Matthew Arnold and T. S. Eliot, they argued that the hope for literature was dependent on the recognition of a tradition which was available only to the "saving remnant," a small, conscious sensitive minority. As one cultural historian puts it,

Leavis saw the new media of communication--news-papers, magazines, radio, cinema, and television--as the menacing apogee of commercialism and industrial civilization. They threatened to obliterate every critical standard, on which the existence of culture depended, in a new barbarism. The duty of a literary critic was to fight uncompromisingly and unceasingly against any dilution or degeneration of these standards. . . . The pages of Scrutiny are pervaded by an immense pessimism: a sense of inexorable cultural atrophy, and of a dwindling minority aware of it.¹⁵

¹⁴Harrison, p. 26.

¹⁵Perry Anderson, "Components of the National Culture," in Student Power: Problems, Diagnosis, Action, eds. Alexander Cockburn and Robin Blackburn (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1969), p. 272.

Even I. A. Richards--although he was later to focus on the social uses of literacy in his study of Basic English--in his Practical Criticism (1929) assumes a highly literate, self-conscious minority as a prerequisite for the proper response to literature.

The elitist theory of politics and its literary counterpart came together in the work of T. E. Hulme. According to Harrison, Hulme "was the seminal mind from which Lewis, Pound, Yeats and Eliot derived their ideas; at least, his thinking is typical of theirs."¹⁶ Profoundly influenced by Bergson, it was from this French philosopher that Hulme adopted "the concept of discontinuity in nature," and "his view of the artist as a man deficient in the normal human orientation to action."¹⁷ Hulme rejected the humanist belief in the perfectability of man; humanism failed to acknowledge the existence of original sin. He saw life as basically tragic and rejected the idea of progress, seeing human action toward perfection as an exercise in futility. Hulme "saw God as the ultimate object of worship, but advocated that strict religious discipline and obedience to God should have their counterpart in political discipline and obedience to the state. Man can only accomplish anything

¹⁶Harrison, p. 30.

¹⁷Kermode, p. 122.

by discipline, ethical and political."¹⁸ Hulme did not believe man to be the measure of all things, nor did he believe that the goal of all social action should be to create a society in which man could realize this full potential. Instead, he believed that this would lead to an overemphasis on "personality," which in literature he identified as "romanticism." He argued for "classicism," which he identified as an attitude which separates man from the natural world, a desire for permanence "in fixity and rigidity, and . . . a tendency towards abstraction."¹⁹ As Frank Kermode argues,

For Hulme, the epoch of humanism, anti-religious in every department of life, but visibly so in art, was ending. He lavishes his contempt upon it; with a sort of doctrinaire fury he eliminates as bad and anti-religious (because on the side of life) even Michelangelo. . . . The art he cares for is that of the period which the Renaissance ended, an epoch which believed in Original Sin, and produced, at its best, a geometric art quite distinct from the vitalism of Renaissance art, which ministered to the spectator's pleasure in being alive, his desire to be acting. The art of Byzantium abhors all this, being concerned with absolute non-human values; being life alien, remote from organic life and even detesting it.²⁰

Hulme saw in the twentieth century "a desire for mechanical precision, austerity and bareness in literature and the fine arts, as opposed to the naturalism and vitality

¹⁸Harrison, p. 31.

¹⁹Harrison, p. 32.

²⁰Kermode, pp. 124-25.

of post-Renaissance art."²¹ Harrison argues that Hulme had a major influence on Pound, Lewis, Yeats and Eliot; they, too, "rejected the humanist tradition in literature, and in society, the democratic, humanitarian tradition. The same principles governed their social criticism as their literary criticism, and led them to support the fascist cause, either directly, as Pound and Lewis did, or indirectly as Yeats and Eliot did."²² Just at the time when science and philosophy were abandoning metaphysical absolutes, Hulme, influenced by Bergson and Barres and Maurras of the Action Française movement, was trying to bring them into art; as science and philosophy became more skeptical, Hulme advocated rigidity and fixity in art, and authority in ethical and esthetic values. Yeats, Pound, Lewis and Eliot are singled out as being particularly influenced by Hulme, but as Harrison documents, fascism had "widespread support" among the intelligensia and powerful in England.²³

The preceding discussion was not intended as a comprehensive literary history of the period 1890-1930. Instead, I have attempted to point out some of the social and intellectual developments which I believe were the most

²¹Harrison, loc. cit.

²²Ibid., p. 33.

²³Cf. Harrison, pp. 34-35.

significant in countering the rise of a viable Marxist criticism, developments which later Marxist critics, especially Caudwell, were obliged to acknowledge. Certainly there were other elements.

Perhaps the most significant situation from a historical point of view was the relative stability of British society during the years under discussion. Opposing ideologies which offer radical alternatives to the prevailing world view come to the forefront most often in times of crisis. However, the period between 1890 and 1914 in Britain--often described as the Pax Britannica--was generally free of mass social unrest. With the partition of Africa, Britain's imperial adventure was in full swing. The ruling symbols were the Queen, the Flag, the Fleet, and the Empire. By the turn of the century, Liberalism was on the rise. The 1897 Workmen's Compensation Act, the 1902 Education Act, the Liberal Education Bill of 1906, and the Trades Disputes Bill, which counteracted the Taff Vale decision, all seemed to promise a better future for the lower classes. 1906 witnessed the triumph of the Labour Party, which by then claimed over two million members. The Labour Party co-opted many of the leaders of the earlier militant, revolutionary Socialist movements. Although in 1909 a Parliamentary committee had reported that one-eighth of the population controlled one-half of the wealth, that one-third of the working men

received less than twenty-five shillings a week and that less than one-fourth received more than thirty-five shillings per week, the reforms of that year, including the Labour Exchange Act, the Trades Board Act, and the House and Planning Act, appeared to indicate that things were improving. Moreover, although there was a revival of labor unrest in 1911 which culminated in 1914 with the threat of a general strike, World War I stifled the pre-occupation of the workers with their lot by enlisting their bodies and their minds in an epidemic of nationalism and patriotic fervor. Even after the war, the intelligentsia's gestures of disgust and despair (e.g., in Graves' Goodbye to All That [1929], Huxley's Point Counter Point [1928], and Eliot's The Wasteland [1922]) did not materialize until the Twenties, nor were the economic consequences fully felt until the middle Twenties (e.g., in unemployment: 1920-2.2%; 1924-10.3%; 1926-12.5%). No radical solutions were felt to be necessary. In 1924 the Labour Party, which had banned any Communist from running as a Labour candidate, served as a minority government for nine months. After the collapse of the General Strike in 1926, the Labour Party had to obtain the support of the Liberals for any legislation the government wished to pass; this precluded the adoption of any legislation of a radical socialistic nature. Even as late as 1931, when Labour tried to run on a platform

of various measures of socialization, the Conservatives attacked their programs as "bolshevism gone wild," and overwhelmingly defeated them. Britain was not ready for any social revolution.

Besides these rather broad intellectual currents that were either explicitly or implicitly opposed to Marxism and the relative stability of British society which mitigated against radical and revolutionary solutions to social problems, in a more specific and methodological context, Marxism was (and still is) competing with methodologies derived from two other nineteenth century giants--Sigmund Freud and Sir James Frazer--and a new critical methodology, which was influenced by recent developments in science and analytical philosophy and in which found its clearest expression in the early work of I. A. Richards. In terms of the development of a Marxist approach to literature, these competing methodologies (all of which assume a particular world view distinct from Marxism) are especially significant. Indeed, one can argue that Christopher Caudwell's works, especially Illusion and Reality, are as concerned with criticizing the psychological-psychoanalytical, the mythical, and the "formal" approaches to literature as they are in developing a systematic Marxist perspective on literature.

In 1910 A. A. Brill had made an English translation of Freud's Three Contributions to the Theory of

Sex; in 1912 he translated The Interpretation of Dreams. Thus, before the Twenties, many writers and critics were familiar with some of Freud's theories. Already in 1910 Ernest Jones, one of Freud's most astute pupils, had submitted a paper entitled "The Oedipus Complex as an Explanation of Hamlet's Mystery," to the American Journal of Psychology, in which he attempted to show how Freudian psychology could be used to interpret motivation in fictitious characters to account for hitherto unresolved mysterious behavior. I. A. Richards in his Principles of Literary Criticism (1924) demonstrated how psychological knowledge could give insight into the elements of the aesthetic experience, and by 1926 Herbert Read in Reason and Romanticism was arguing for the application of psychology and psychoanalytic concepts in literary criticism.

Another of Freud's pupils, Carl Jung, was influential in the development of a mythological approach to literature. In 1928, in an article, "On the Relation of Analytic Psychology to Poetic Art," Jung spelled out his concept of the archetype. Sixteen years before, Jane Harrison, in her Themis: A Study of the Social Origins of Greek Religion (1912), began a new direction in the study of Greek art by the application of Sir James Fraser's concepts found in the Golden Bough (1890-1915) and initiated what became known as the "Cambridge School"

of classical scholarship. Works such as Themis, and her Ancient Art and Ritual (1913), as well as Gilbert Murray's Euripedes and His Age (1913), F. M. Cornford's The Origins of Attic Comedy (1914), Jesse Weston's From Ritual to Romance (1920), and Lord Raglan's The Hero: A Study of Myth and Drama (1937) explored the mythic origins of art in terms of ritual and analyzed the development of culture heroes as examples of a single archetype. An early example of the application of some of the assumptions and methods of this approach to literature was the appearance of Maud Bodkin's Archetypal Patterns in Poetry (1934).

During this period, I. A. Richards was one of the seminal minds in the field of literary criticism. He initiated a movement which was to develop into the dominant methodology of critical analysis and which was to offer the most cogent arguments against competing approaches, including the Marxist approach. Indeed, Stanley Edgar Hyman argues that in 1924 "modern criticism . . . began more or less formally . . . with the publication of I. A. Richards' Principles of Literary Criticism. . . ." ²⁴ Complementing many of the arguments of the analytical school of philosophical analysis,

²⁴ Stanley Edgar Hyman, The Armed Vision: A Study in the Methods of Literary Criticism (New York: Knopf, 1948), p. 7.

especially Wittgenstein, Richards argued from semantic principles and proposed a distinction "between the emotive and referential 'uses of language.'" He rejected the assumption that poetry could claim any referential truth, that it referred to the world "out there." The "truth" of art was more like the "validity" of logical argument; it could be determined only by understanding the "'internal necessity'" and the "'rightness'" of its organic form. As Wimsatt and Brooks argue, "Whereas scientific truth has to do with the correspondence to the nature of reality, artistic 'truth' is a matter of inner coherence."²⁵ In this work as well as in Practical Criticism (1929), Richards made important contributions to the development of the formalist school of criticism; the argument that literature was the "completest mode of utterance," the advocacy of close reading and textual analysis as the foundation for interpretation and judgment, and the insistence upon an attention to the words, syntax and grammar--the language--of the work. Richards' argument paralleled Hulme's insistence that the task of art, particularly poetry, is "precise description . . . this precision concerns the recording of images."²⁶ In the spirit of reductionism characteristic of Russell's

²⁵Wimsatt and Brooks, Literary Criticism, p. 625.

²⁶Kermode, p. 127.

"Philosophy of Logical Atomism," Wittgenstein's Tractatus and Ayer's Language, Truth and Logic (Richards was also at Cambridge) Richards argued for precise, systematic analysis as a method of criticism and as a pedagogical technique and asserted that meaning and validity of expressive symbols was defined solely in terms of the created world of the art work. To my knowledge, the extent to which Richards was influenced by the new philosophy has not been investigated; however, his work is permeated with scientific jargon that is characteristic of later formalistic criticism despite the movement's explicit opposition to science.

Another important idea that had its origins in Richards' Principles of Literary Criticism and his Foundations of Aesthetics (1925) is the concept of synaesthesia--"a harmony and equilibrium of our impulses"²⁷--as the determinant quality of aesthetic experience. Taking his cue from some of Coleridge's ideas, Richards saw the world as infinitely complex, full of ambiguity, tension, and paradox; from this world, poetry selects and orders experiences into an organic, integrated whole and achieves a "balanced poise" in its resolution of apparently antithetical attitudes. The order that man seeks is available in literature. The writer and the

²⁷Wimsatt and Brooks, p. 615.

reader can come to grips with experience by "containing" it, by symbolically resolving its tensions, not by action which seeks to change the society which gives rise to these contradictions. From Richards' point of view, art seemed to be a means of freedom from society and a defense against politics, commercialism, vulgarity, and the social process itself.

In the twenties, criticism developed into something like a growth industry, became increasingly professional and specialized, and tended more and more to be written by academics. Professor Bradbury observes,

In our century we have seen a remarkable professionalization of the critic at the university level, and more and more he has become the custodian of long-term reputation. In fact, of course, he is himself somewhat the product of his own professional duties; the writer he prefers, and the judgments he advances, often have to do with a broad historical assessment of cultural significance, though there can be little doubt that he has certain vested interest in devoting himself to works that are by nature complex and subject to elaborate decoding.²⁸

These, then, are the major social and intellectual developments which I consider competed most significantly with Marxism as a social movement, as an ideology, and as methodology. Although this does not fully explain why Marxism remained on the periphery of the social and intellectual movements between 1890 and 1930, taken all

²⁸Bradbury, pp. 133-34.

together they constituted a formidable obstacle to the acceptance of a theory which insisted on a unity of theory and praxis with avowed revolutionary aims. Many of these developments will be dealt with in greater detail in the final section of this study; for the moment, it is sufficient to note them and to realize that most of them--e.g., the crisis in science, the results of analytical philosophy, the problem of consciousness and the irrational, the findings of anthropology, psychology, and the beginnings of formalistic theory, etc.--find their way, in one form or another, into the works of Christopher Caudwell.

The Thirties: The Resurgence of Marxism and Marxist Literary Theory

Britain enjoyed a feeling of social stability until the late Twenties. Although many of the intelligentsia had been disgusted and disillusioned by the slaughter of World War I, the full economic repercussions were not felt, especially by the middle class, until the early Thirties. As late as the middle 1920's, it still appeared as if Britain could "muddle through" whatever crisis she confronted; it was reform, not revolution, that gave hope to the Liberals and the Labourites.

It was not until the middle of the Thirties that the British intelligentsia aligned themselves in large numbers with Marxism. For one thing, although the lower

classes had been suffering the effects of mass unemployment since the late Twenties and had taken the initial hardships of the Great Depression, unemployment did not directly and severely affect the middle classes until about 1934, when the unemployment rate for professional and clerical positions soared to 350,000. One historian writes that confronted with this situation,

. . . some of the most promising university graduates turned to teaching and tutoring for want of better opportunity. W. H. Auden, Arthur Calder-Marshall, C. Day Lewis, Michael Redgrave, Edward Upward, and Christopher Isherwood are but a few. Positions in foreign colleges, universities, and schools were taken by Rex Warner, Malcolm Muggeridge, Julien Bell, William Empson, and William Plomer. . . . Student Publications, such as Student Vanguard [a joint publication of Cambridge and Oxford Universities], repeatedly spoke of the menace of middle-class unemployment. International Communist organs warned that the enemployed [sic.] black-coats were filling the ranks of fascism, as proved to be the case with the small British Union of Fascists led by Sir Oswald Mosley.²⁹

Fascism did seem to offer some sort of solution to many of the disenchanted, but the irrational violence and the militarism of the National Socialists in Germany and Italy as well as the barbarism of the Japanese in Manchuria frightened and alienated a large section of the intelligensia; many "young intellectuals like David Guest and Humphrey Slater, who returned to Britain [from the Continent, were] convinced that communism was the only defense against fascism and the war."³⁰ Moreover, the

²⁹ Wood, p. 38.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 39.

insurrection of Francisco Franco and his generals in July 17-18, 1936, which began the agony of the Spanish Civil War, made the threat of fascism even more real and, as a consequence, pushed more intellectuals to the left. Philip Toynbee, in his memoir Friends Apart, wrote,

It is easy to see now that the Spanish Civil War was, from the very beginning, the tragic, drawn-out death agony of a political epoch. Once the generals had made their revolt, they would eventually win it; once they had won it, a world war would be fought against fascist aggression, but not for anything we had hoped for in 1936. And even at the time there was some sense that this was the last chance for the politics of Attempting the Good, as opposed to the subsequent politics of Avoiding the Worse. The political optimists were never more united in England, or more enthusiastic.³¹

Fascism appeared to many as the logical outcome of the intellectual movements that were discussed in the preceding section; irrationalism, authoritarianism, nationalism, elitism, anti-humanism,--all seemed to be part of the fascist ideology. Science and analytical philosophy had undermined tradition and belief and made skepticism intellectually respectable. On the other hand, it was apparent that something had to be done; one had to make a commitment. Communism offered an alternative to both the economic problems and the threat of fascism. As one scholar puts it,

Communism offered dramatic and radical solutions to dramatic and radical defects. It had a coherent

³¹Cited in Hoskins, Today the Struggle, p. 7.

philosophy, sufficiently abstract to be worth talking about, a romantic apparatus of intrigue and a practical success in Russia. The Labour Party, in contrast, seemed dowdy, more concerned with respectability than with action. . . . Idealists found ideals, and a formula for implementing them, in Marxist socialism. They felt that the Marxist view of society and its ills, and of art and culture too, was at least considering real problems. . . .³²

Recalling that period, Spender says, ". . . rightly or wrongly there appeared to be in the "Thirties" a choice between Communism and Fascism. . . ." ³³ Spender adds that "in the late twenties the writer had ceased to feel responsible towards society. The purpose of art seemed directed towards creating separate private worlds of the imagination, incorporating values derived from the past but with no hope that they would influence the life of existing contemporary institutions. Poetry could be simply regarded as a ritual for releasing forces of the unconscious" (e.g., the surrealists). However, Spender writes, "What happened to the 1930's writers was that a combination of events at first challenged their sense of detachment, and then put them through sympathy and intelligence, imaginatively and sometimes actively, at the centre of those events."³⁴ This "combination of

³²D. E. S. Maxwell, Poets of the Thirties (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1968), pp. 2-3.

³³Stephen Spender, "The Literary Mood of the 1930s," Tri-Quarterly (Fall 1964), p. 15.

³⁴Ibid., p. 18.

events" was the onset of the Great Depression and the rise of fascism. The communists provided an analysis of the situation and a solution. Furthermore, they provided something else; as Spender puts it,

In addition to this they were in a situation in which they were critics, critics, that is of moral and even literary attitudes. . . . The early writings of Edmund Wilson, much influenced by Marxism, are of this kind, as are the writings in which the emphasis is more on society and politics than on literature of Dwight MacDonal. But the 1930's added a great impetus to criticism altogether. Their great influence was on the literary mind, was precisely this: that communism provided a challenge of conscience in a situation in which the intolerable evil of Fascism was not met by the democracies. This was a challenge which extended far beyond politics and deeply influenced the arts.³⁵

Within this situation, the influence of the Soviet Union was significant. The success of the Bolsheviks and the consolidation of their Revolution in the 20's and 30's seemed to indicate, at least on the surface, that Marxism was not simply a utopian dream, that it was a possibility that could be realized in practice. The Webbs, for example, had first condemned the 1917 Revolution, but in the early 1930's they visited the country and "fell in love with Soviet Russia. They saw it in the emergence of a new civilization . . . the realization of Socialist dreams."³⁶ In 1935 they wrote Soviet Communism: A New

³⁵ Ibid., p. 20.

³⁶ Barbara Drake, "The Webbs and Soviet Communism," in Margaret Cole, ed. The Webbs and Their Work (London: Muller, 1949), pp. 221-32, cited in Neal Wood, Communism and the British Intellectuals, p. 45.

Civilization? (reissued in 1937 without the question mark) which "created a stir in intellectual world, becoming one of the most widely read and influential works in Britain," and "probably did more than any other [work] to enhance the myth of the Soviet Union."³⁷

Moreover, from the point of view of English artists and critics, something very important was going on in the Soviet Union. Russia appeared to be the home of exciting new experiments in art; concepts such as "Imagism," "Futurism," "Constructivism," "Formalism," "Cosmism," "Socialist Realism," and "proletarian art," were being debated not only by Soviet artists and critics, but by Russian political leaders such as Lenin and Trotsky and Stalin. Whatever their ultimate contribution to literary theory, at least they took art seriously. Indeed, it must have seemed rather strange to the Anglo-American intelligensia that men such as Plekhanov, Trotsky, Lenin, and Stalin, men who were intimately involved in guiding the destiny of Russia and the Revolution, would be concerned with art at all. However, no matter how strange it seemed, for many of those who cared about art, the picture would have appeared hopeful. Here were people who really believed that literature mattered, that it not only arose out of specific historical relationships, but that

³⁷Wood, p. 45.

it had a real social function, that it could influence the direction society was to take. They argued that the artist had a genuine role to play in the historical development of society, and they were trying to re-integrate him and his art back into the social process, to overcome his alienation.

Russia had become the home of Marxist criticism, and as early as 1910 some of George Plekhanov's critical studies were being translated into English.³⁸ In Britain, the Modern Quarterly published in the Twenties a number of his essays--e.g., "Materialism and Art," excerpts from "Monist View of History" and "French Dramatic Literature," "Art and Social Life--which were later published as Art and Social Life (1953). In the Thirties, Plekhanov's ideas, especially his warnings about the dangers (apology for the status quo, deliberate obscurity) of the doctrine of art-for-art's sake, were being debated in radical literary journals,³⁹ and Caudwell, for example, was familiar with both Plekhanov's Fundamental Problems of Marxism (1929) and Essays in the History of Materialism (1934). Despite the polemics, there is an

³⁸The first was perhaps his "Ibsen, Petty Bourgeois Revolutionist," which appeared in the Daily People, Sunday edition, February 20-April 3, 1910.

³⁹Cf. A. Lunacharsky, "Analysing Plekhanov's Views on Art," International Literature, No. 11 (1935), 43-61.

appearance of precision, rigor, and systemization that is absent in Morris' work. For example, his essay on "Materialism and Art," which appeared in the Modern Quarterly--Spring 1924, 68-77--is a critique of the assumptions and methodology of the nineteenth century French critics, Madame de Stael, Guizot, Sainte-Beuve, and Taine, credited with being the founders of the sociology of literature.

He begins by stating, "I am deeply convinced that criticism (more exactly scientific theorizing on esthetics) can now advance only if it rests on the materialist conception of history. I also think that in its past development, too, criticism acquired a firmer basis, the nearer its exponents approached to the view of history I advocate. In illustration, I shall point to the evolution of criticism in France."⁴⁰ On Madame de Stael, he writes,

The only thing we have to note is that, in Madame de Stael's opinion, national character is a product of historical conditions. But what is national character, if not human nature as manifested in the spiritual characteristics of the given nations?

And if the nature of any nation is a product of its historical development, then obviously it could not have been the prime mover of this development. From which it follows that literature, being a reflection of a nation's spiritual character, is a product of the same historical conditions that

⁴⁰ George Plekhanov, Unaddressed Letters and Art and Social Life (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1957), pp. 43-44.

begot the national character. Hence it is not human nature, nor the character of the given nation, but its history and its social system that explain its literature. It is from this standpoint that Madame de Stael considers the literature of France.⁴¹

Discussing Taine, he says,

. . . it follows from what Taines says that the mentality of people is determined by their situation, and that their situation is determined by their mentality. This led to a number of contradictions and difficulties, which Taine, like the 18th Century philosophers, resolved by appealing to human nature, which with him took the form of race. . . . We know that the Renaissance began earlier in Italy than anywhere else, and that Italy, generally, was the first country to end the medieval way of life. What caused this change in the situation of the Italians?--The properties of the Italian race, Taine replies. I leave you to judge how satisfactory this explanation is, and shall pass to another example.⁴²

Plekhanov argues that it is this "contradiction which ruled out any fruitful development of the intelligent and profound views of the French art critics." The contradiction "could have been avoided only by a man who said: The art of any people is determined by its mentality; its mentality is a product of its situation, and its situation is determined in the final analysis by the state of its productive forces and its relations to production. But a man who would have said this would have been enunciating the materialist view of history."⁴³

⁴¹Ibid., p. 46.

⁴²Ibid., p. 49.

⁴³Ibid., p. 51.

Plekhanov also uses recent discoveries in archaeology, anthropology, and economic history to investigate the art of primitive peoples, and argues that there is a "causal connection" between the tribe's "ornaments and the productive forces at the disposal" of the tribe.⁴⁴ He emphasizes the functional aspects of primitive art (an aspect that Caudwell was later to greatly elaborate), arguing that in some tribes art has "exchange value."⁴⁵ Discussing the utilitarian functions of ornaments he asks, "Is there a causal connection between these ornaments and the productive forces at the disposal of the Fan tribe? Not only is there such a connection; it veritably strikes the eye. The male attire of this tribe is a typical hunter's attire. The female ornaments--beads and bracelets--have no direct connection with hunting, but they are secured in exchange for one of the most valuable products of the chase--ivory."⁴⁶ While stressing the economic foundations and implications of art, Plekhanov is, like Marx, not strictly deterministic. He explains:

I have said time again that even in primitive hunting societies esthetic tastes are not always determined by technology and economics directly. Not infrequently, rather numerous and diversified intermediate "factors" exert their influence. But even an indirect causal connection is still a causal connection. If A in one instance engenders

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 131.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 130.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 130.

C directly, and, in another, does so through B which it has itself engendered previously, can it be said that C does not owe its origin to A? If a given custom, say, springs from a superstition, or from vanity, or from the desire to terrify enemies, this does not provide the ultimate explanation of the origin of the custom. We still have to ask whether the superstition from which it sprang was not characteristic of the given mode of life--the hunting mode, for example--and whether the way in which man satisfied his vanity or terrified his enemies was not determined by the productive forces of society and its economy.

We have only to ask this question, and the irrefutable logic of facts compels us to answer it in the affirmative.⁴⁷

Among other things, Plekhanov deals with some of the same topics that Morris touched on. (I do not know whether or not Plekhanov had read any of Morris' works, but he had read Ruskin and quoted from him in Art and Social Life.) Morris, for the most part, retained in his criticism the idealist position that "beauty" was in some way timeless and based on certain eternal principles, that it was an ideal that transcended any particular set of social conditions. However, just as Marx who asserts that man's senses were the work of all previous history, Plekhanov argues that "the ideal of beauty prevailing at any time in any society or class of society is rooted partly in the biological conditions of mankind's development--which, incidentally, also produce distinctive racial features--and partly in the historical conditions in which the given society or class arose

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 133.

and exists." He goes on to say,

It therefore always has a very rich content that is not absolute, not unconditional, but quite specific. He who worships "pure beauty" does not thereby become independent of the biological and historical social conditions which determine his esthetic taste; he only more or less consciously closes his eyes to these conditions.⁴⁸

This assertion is in the context of Plekhanov's discussion of "art for art's sake," which is the main topic of his Art and Social Life. Again, while Morris attacks this doctrine as elitist and predicts that it would mean the death of art if followed, he does not clearly explain why this particular doctrine arises when it does.

Plekhanov attempts to do just this and makes a distinction between the belief in art for art's sake and the "utilitarian view of art." He argues that "the belief in art for art's sake arises when artists and people keenly interested in art are hopelessly out of harmony with their social environment."⁴⁹ The artist feels that there is a massive contradiction between his aims and the aims of society. He pits himself against the prevailing social order but has little hope of changing it. Plekhanov explains that this doctrine (i.e., art for art's sake) may have a certain, limited advantage in that it allows the artist to create works that are in opposition to the

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 176.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 163. Plekhanov's italics.

ruling ideas and attitudes of his time. On the other hand, there is the danger that the artist may become an apologist for the status quo, or, as man's praxis undercuts the prevailing ideology and forces social changes, art for art's sake, if it becomes dogma, may lead to mysticism and deliberate obscurity. Plekhanov argues for a "utilitarian view of art, which he defines as "the tendency to impart to its productions the significance of judgements on the phenomena of life, and the joyful eagerness, which always accompanies it, to take part in social strife, [it] arises and spreads wherever there is mutual sympathy between a considerable section of society and people who have a more or less active interest in art."⁵⁰ Obviously, for Plekhanov, the "considerable section of society" is the proletariat, and as time went by his criterion for value is more and more determined by his assessment of the author's political ideology. For the purposes of this discussion, Plekhanov's significance lies in his extension of Morris' work. It has been noted that Morris underestimated the role of the artist and art as agents in human history; as Edward Thompson says, "Morris paid next to no attention in his lectures to the role of arts in the fight to win Socialism--their power to inspire and change people in the struggle."⁵¹ By

⁵⁰ Plekhanov, loc. cit.

⁵¹ Edward Thompson, William Morris, p. 772.

contrast, Plekhanov specifically enunciates the "utilitarian" or functional view of art. As one critic explains,

Art is to be understood as directly reflecting, and instrumentally validating, the existing disposition of the economic relations and class structure of society. Just as in the case of conventional morality, the art of a given historical period will be the embodiment of a rationale, the ideology of existing conditions. The function of aesthetic culture thus construed is at once highly utilitarian and didactic.⁵²

Perhaps this judgment is overly simplified,⁵³ but it is certainly safe to say that Plekhanov brings into focus the problem of functionalism in art which was only implicit in much of Marx's and Morris' writings. Moreover, this "utilitarian" emphasis is applied to other aspects of his aesthetics. He is systematic where Marx, Engels, and Morris are not. As Lee Baxandall explains, "Among Marxists he was the first to discuss art and literature systematically," and his Art and Social Life, "published in 1912 . . . translated several times during the 1930's, . . . was perhaps the single most influential model for American [and British, if one considers Caudwell] Marxian criticism of that time."⁵⁴

⁵²Willis H. Truitt, "Mr. Baxandall's Revisionism: 'Marxism and Aesthetics' (A Reply)," JAAC, 28, No. 4 (Summer 1970), 512.

⁵³Cf. Lee Baxandall, "Marxism and Aesthetics: A Critique of the Contribution of George Plekhanov," JAAC, 25 (Spring, 1967), 267-79. This is the article to which Truitt is replying.

⁵⁴Baxandall, pp. 267-68.

Another Russian critic who attacked the doctrine of art for art's sake and who seems in some respects closer than Plekhanov to Morris was Leon Trotsky. Even before the Thirties, Trotsky's literary views were fairly well known in the United States and Great Britain. Trotsky's Literature and Revolution, a collection of essays put together in 1925, was reviewed in the Sunday Worker (London) by Charles Ashleigh (November 1, 1925, p. 8) and in the Modern Quarterly by V. F. Calverton, the American Marxist critic.⁵⁵ In 1932, F. R. Leavis, who opposed a Marxist approach to literature, said of Literature and Revolution, "This book shows him to be a cultivated as well as an unusually intelligent man (which perhaps has something to do with his misfortune). But he, too, unhappily, like all the Marxists, practices, with the familiar air of scientific rigor, the familiar vague, blanketing use of essential terms."⁵⁶ T. S. Eliot, in "Commentary" for his Criterion calls Trotsky "a man of first-rate intelligence, expressing himself in a rough and ready metaphorical style, and he utters a good deal of common sense."⁵⁷

⁵⁵Cf. Modern Quarterly, 2, No. 1 (1925), 78-79.

⁵⁶F. R. Leavis, "Under Which King, Bezonian?" I, 168.

⁵⁷T. S. Eliot, "Commentary," The Criterion, 3, No. 52 (January 1933), 245.

In a number of ways, Trotsky mediates between the Romantic-Marxist approach of Morris and the more militant, political approaches of Plekhanov, Lenin and Stalin. He is more logical, systematic, and pragmatic than Morris and less dogmatic, utilitarian, and politically ideological than Lenin, and especially Stalin. He does see economics as the primary determinant of art and argues for the class nature of all culture:

. . . the fundamental processes of the growth of bourgeois culture and of its crystallization into style were determined by the characteristics of the bourgeoisie as a possessing and exploiting class. The bourgeoisie not only developed materially within feudal society, entwining itself in various ways with the latter and attracting wealth into its own hands, but it weaned the intelligensia to its side and created its cultural foundation (schools, universities, academies, newspapers, magazines) long before it openly took possession of the state.⁵⁸

He argues that "culture feeds on the sap of economics, and a material surplus is necessary, so that culture may grow, develop and become subtle."⁵⁹ He attacks the Russian intelligensia for holding themselves aloof from the struggle for the Revolution; he thinks the debate concerning the doctrine of art for art's sake as opposed to the "utilitarian" view is pointless. He explains that,

⁵⁸ Leon Trotsky, Literature and Revolution (1925 rpt. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1960), pp. 187-88.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 9.

the quarrels about "pure art" and about art with a tendency [i.e., Engels' concept of "tendenciousness"] took place between the liberals and the "populists." They do not become us. Materialistic dialectics are above this; from the point of view of an objective historical process, art is always a social servant and historically utilitarian.⁶⁰

On the other hand, he attacks the concept of a "proletarian culture." He concedes that from one point of view "'style is class,'" but argues that "style is not born with a class at all. A class finds its style in extremely complex ways. It would be very simple if a writer, just because he was a proletarian, loyal to his class, could stand at the crossing of the roads and announce: 'I am the style of the proletariat!'"⁶¹ Trotsky defines culture as "the organic sum of knowledge and capacity which characterizes the entire society, or at least its ruling class,"⁶² but he attacks the idea of a proletarian culture. The revolution will not produce a culture but the basis for a culture. Trotsky explains:

The essence of the new culture will be not an aristocratic one for a privileged minority, but a mass culture, a universal and popular one. Quantity will pass into quality; with the growth of the quantity of culture will come a rise in its level and a change in its character. But this process will develop only through a series of historic stages. In the degree to which it is successful it will weaken the class character of the proletariat and in this way it will wipe out the basis of a proletarian culture.⁶³

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 168.

⁶¹ Ibid., pp. 205-06.

⁶² Ibid., p. 200.

⁶³ Ibid., pp. 192-93.

Trotsky's vision of the new classless society is substantially the same as that of Marx and Morris; it is an aesthetic vision. It will be a society "which will have thrown off the pinching and stultifying worry about one's daily bread, . . . in which children, all the children, will be well fed and strong and gay, and in which they will absorb the fundamental elements of science and art as they absorb albumen and air and the warmth of the sun," ⁶⁴ In this situation, "art then will become more general, will mature, will become tempered, and will become the most perfect method of the progressive building of life in every field. It will not be merely 'pretty' without relation to anything else." ⁶⁵

Trotsky concludes Literature and Revolution with a concept of the future that is almost poetic in its aesthetic Marxian vision:

It is difficult to predict the extent of self-government which the man of the future may reach or the heights to which he may carry his technique. Social construction and psycho-physical self-education will become two aspects of one and the same process. All the arts--literature, drama, painting, music and architecture will lend this process beautiful form. More correctly, the shell in which the cultural construction and self-education of Communist man will be enclosed, will develop all the vital elements of contemporary art to the highest point. Man will become immeasurably stronger, wiser and subtler; his voice more

⁶⁴ Trotsky, p. 188.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 230.

musical. The forms of life will become dynamically dramatic. The average human type will rise to the heights of an Aristotle, a Goethe, or a Marx, and above this ridge new peaks will rise.⁶⁶

As with Marx and Morris, art becomes life and life becomes art.

Concerning methodology, Trotsky makes some cogent remarks in arguing for a Marxist perspective. He observes that,

It is unquestionably true that the need for art is not created by economic conditions. But neither is the need for food created by economics. On the contrary, the need for food and warmth creates economics. It is very true that one cannot always go by the principles of Marxism in deciding whether to reject or to accept a work of art. A work of art should, in the first place, be judged by its own law, that is, by the law of art [which is?] But Marxism alone can explain why and how a given tendency in art has originated in a given period of history; in other words, who it was who made a demand for such an artistic form and not for another, and why.

It would be childish to think that every class can entirely and fully create its own art from within itself, and, particularly, that the proletariat is capable of creating a new art by means of closed art guilds or circles, or by the Organization for Proletarian Culture, etc. Generally speaking, the artistic work of man is continuous. Each new rising class places itself on the shoulders of its preceding one. But this continuity is dialectic, that is, it finds itself by means of internal repulsions and breaks. New artistic needs or demands for new literary and artistic points of view are stimulated by economics, through the development of a new class, and minor stimuli are supplied by changes in the position of the class, under the influence of the growth of its wealth and cultural power. Artistic creation is always a complicated turning inside out of old forms,

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 255.

under the influence of new stimuli which originate outside of art. In this large sense of the word, art is a handmaiden. It is not a disembodied element feeding on itself, but a function of social man indissolubly tied to his life and environment. . . . Materialism does not deny the significance of the element of form, either in logic, jurisprudence, or art. Just as a system of jurisprudence can and must be judged by its internal logic and consistency, so art can and must be judged from the point of view of its achievements in form, because there can be no art without them. However, a juridical theory which attempted to establish the independence of law from social conditions would be defective at its very base. Its moving force lies in economics--in class contradictions. . . . Literature, whose methods and processes have their roots far back in the most distant past and represent the accumulated experience of verbal craftsmanship, expresses the thoughts, feelings, moods, points of view and hope of the new epoch and of its new class. One cannot jump beyond this.⁶⁷

From a methodological point of view, Trotsky is rather flexible. He attacks the formalist approach to literary criticism, not because it is wrong in principle, but because it does not go far enough. As he puts it,

The methods of formal analysis are necessary, but insufficient. You may count up the alliterations in popular proverbs, classify metaphors, count up the number of vowels and consonants in a wedding song. It will undoubtedly enrich our knowledge of folk art, in one way or another; but if you don't know the part the scythe plays, and if you have not mastered the meaning of the church calendar to the peasant, of the time when the peasant marries, or when the peasant women give birth, you will only have understood the outer shell of folk art, but the kernel will not have been reached. . . . The effort to set art free from life, to declare it a craft self-sufficient unto itself, devitalizes and kills art. The very need of such an operation

⁶⁷ Ibid., pp. 178-80.

is an unmistakable symptom of intellectual decline.⁶⁸

Trotsky's opposition to some of Lenin's ideas and to Stalinism made him a target of contempt and ridicule in many of the radical literary journals of the Thirties. Nevertheless, he is directly in the Marxist tradition, and his contributions to this tradition are substantial and significant.

Both Plekhanov and Trotsky emphasized the ideological function of literature. Plekhanov judged literature according to the determinate idea, which he interpreted as "the psychologically fruitful idea, founded on accurate awareness of social relationships and consciousness."⁶⁹ Of course, this "accurate awareness" would be founded on a Marxist world view. Moreover, Trotsky candidly admitted that the Party would censor any work which had the effect of undermining the Revolution and that the judgment of the Party would be based on political rather than aesthetic criteria. This emphasis on the ideological function of literature and its role in revolutionary action culminated in Lenin's declaration that "literature must become party literature."⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Ibid., 180-81.

⁶⁹ Baxandall, "Marxism and Aesthetics," p. 277.

⁷⁰ Nikolai Lenin, "On Literature," International Literature, 1 (June, 1931), 3.

Translated into English in the Twenties and Thirties, Lenin's advocacy of "party literature" did serious violence to Marx's and Engels' original thoughts. It was Lenin's insistence on "party literature" and on the necessity of judging literature by whether or not it is a "true reflection of social reality," that set the tone of much Marxist criticism of this period. His essays on Tolstoy appeared in the Labour Monthly and the Sunday Worker.⁷¹ He praised Tolstoy's works as accurate reflections of the bourgeois revolution which took place in Russia during the period 1861-1904. In his essay, "Leo Tolstoy, Mirror of the Russian Revolution" (written in 1908 but not published in Britain until 1928), Lenin describes the "contradictions" he finds in Tolstoy:

On the one hand, an artist of genius, but the creator not only of unrivaled pictures of Russian life but of works belonging in the first ranks of world literature. On the other hand, the great landowner mad for Christ. On the one hand, the magnificent powerful, immediate, frank protest against social hypocrisy and falsehood; on the other, the "Tolstyoan," i.e. the worn-out, hysterical sniveler known as the Russian intellectual, who beats his breast and bears public witness: "I am abject, I am revolting, but I am engaged in moral self-improvement, I do not eat meat and I nourish myself on rice cutlets." On the one hand, a merciless criticism of capitalist exploitation, an unmasking of the violence of the government, the comedy of government justice and administration, an exposure of the full depth of the contradiction between the growth of wealth and the achievements of civilization and the growth of poverty, barbarism and suffering by the mass of workers; on the other hand--the insanely bigoted cry of "nonresistance to evil." On the other hand, the soberest realism, the tearing off of every

⁷¹Cf. Nickolai Lenin, "Tolstoy and His Epoch," Labour Monthly (October, 1928), 606-09.

mask; on the other, the propaganda of one of the worst things in the world, namely religion.⁷²

These "contradictions in Tolstoy's views," he continues, "are an accurate reflection of the contradictory conditions under which the historical action of the peasantry in our revolution took place."

Lenin had an appreciation of non-Communist writers. In a letter to Gorky (25 February 1908), he says,

. . . I am of the opinion that an artist can get for himself much that is useful to him in any philosophy. Finally, I completely and absolutely agree that in the matter of creative work you should be free to delve in all books and that drawing this sort of opinion both from your literary experience and from philosophy, even idealistic philosophy, you may reach conclusions which will be of tremendous benefit to the workers' party. That is all very well. Nevertheless, the Proletarian must remain absolutely neutral to all our differences of opinion in philosophy without giving the readers the shadow of an excuse to connect the bolsheviks, as a trend, as a line of tactics of the revolutionary wing of the Russian social-democrats, with empirical-criticism or empirio monism.⁷³

However, the aesthetic-cognitive element is always uppermost in his mind; is the work a "true reflection" of reality? As Lenin's close associate, Lunacharski, observed, his method "takes into consideration not so much

⁷²Cited in Stefan Morawski, "Lenin As A Literary Theorist," Science and Society, 19 (Winter 1965), 10.

⁷³Lenin on Various Writers," International Literature, 2 (February 1935), 61.

the subjective adherence of the writer and his ties with a definite social milieu as his being objectively characteristic for a given historical situation.⁷⁴

Thus, Lenin could appreciate Tolstoy. However, with contemporary writers, the problem is more complex. Since for Lenin, the "objectively characteristic" element of the Russian situation was the winning of the Revolution through revolutionary action led by his party, then the writer was obliged to "reflect" this situation in his works, and the only accurate "reflection" of the situation had to originate from a Marxist-Leninist perspective. Although attempts have been made to demonstrate Lenin's flexibility in this matter,⁷⁵ one is continually brought back to his directive, "On Literature," (in Novaia Zhisn, 12, November 26, 1905) which appeared in England in the first issue of International Literature:

. . . Literature must become party literature. As a counterpart to the bourgeois customs, bourgeois commercialised [sic.] press, a counterpart to bourgeois literary self seeking and individualism, "aristocratic-anarchism" and money hunting--the socialist proletariat must put forward the principle of PARTY LITERATURE, must develop this principle and carry it out in its fullest and completest form.

. . . Down with non-party publicists! Down

⁷⁴A. V. Lunacharski, "Lenin and Literature," International Literature, 1 (January 1935), 67.

⁷⁵Cf. Lunacharski and Morawski.

with literary supermen! Literature must become PART of the general proletarian cause. . . .⁷⁶

The implications of Lenin's directive are clear, and it is not difficult to see how this line of thought comes to its logical conclusion in Stalin's statement that "under the dictatorship of the proletariat, democracy is proletarian democracy--the democracy of the exploited majority based upon the restriction of the rights of the exploiting minority (i.e., the bourgeoisie) and directed against this minority," or his view that "the existence of factions is incompatible with Party unity and with its iron discipline."⁷⁷

Whatever one may think of these views, they are not the views of Marx or Engels and they have almost nothing in common with Marx's and Engels' aesthetic views. Unfortunately, many intellectuals in England and other countries believed that Lenin and Stalin were the only qualified interpreters of Marx, and that Leninism and Stalinism were Marxism brought up-to-date. In 1938, William Phillips, writing for the Partisan Review, summed up the situation:

Up to about 1935, the communist literary movement, claiming to be the legitimate heir of every

⁷⁶ Lenin, "On Literature," p. 3.

⁷⁷ Joseph Stalin, Foundations of Leninism (1924), cited in C. Wright Mills, The Marxists (New York: Dell, 1962), pp. 295, 297.

last nuance of Marx, sponsored two doctrines, under the slogans, "art is a weapon," and "build a proletarian literature." In fact it is these two notions, carried to their farthest implications, which most people thought to be Marxist criticism. And quite naturally so, for the Stalinist position in literature had all the militancy and subversiveness commonly identified with revolutionary thinking. Moreover, it had the plausibility of baby-talk--was it not, therefore, a doctrine for the millions? The logic was simple. If society is divided into two principal classes, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, argued the Stalinists, it follows that each class has its own art, and conversely, that art is so much advertising copy for the interests and the ideas of the class it serves. All art is propaganda! And since society has been ruled for centuries by the bourgeoisie, most art is bourgeois propaganda. The proletariat, however, in its struggle for power, requires an art which would coax the still unenlightened workers and farmers into socialism.⁷⁸

The result of Leninist-Stalinist position was a "monstrous mystification" and vulgarization of Marxism in terms of its principles and its methodology. Furthermore, although this dogma could not be enforced with the "efficiency" that it was in the Soviet Union, it exercised a considerable influence on those writers and critics who were either members of the Party or were sympathetic to it. Radical publications were filled with debates attacking or defending someone's "orthodoxy."

In addition to the Soviet critics, many of Marx's and Engels' works were being translated into English for the first time. Besides Capital (Vol. I, 1887; Vol. II,

⁷⁸William Phillips, "The Esthetic of the Founding Fathers," p. 12.

1907; Vol. III, 1909) and the Communist Manifesto (first translated by Helen Macfarlane and published in 1850 in The Red Republican), both of which went through several editions, several of their major works were now available in English. The following list will perhaps give some idea of what was available:

Selected Essays (London, 1926)

The People's Marx. Abridged Popular Edition of Capital. (London, 1921).

Zur Kritik der hegelschen Rechtsphilosophie Einleitung.-- Zur Judenfrage. Under the title "The Jewish Question" (London, 1935)

The German Ideology (London, 1936)

The Poverty of Philosophy (London, 1900)

Wage-Labour and Capital (London, 1885)

The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte (London, 1926)

Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Germany (London, 1896)

The Eastern Question (London, 1897)

Secret Diplomatic History of the Eighteenth Century (London, 1899)

The Story of the Life of Lord Palmerston (London, 1899)

The Civil War in France (London, 1921)

Critique of the Gotha Programme. Including some extracts from Lenin's State and Revolution (London, 1933)

Herr Eugen Duhring's Revolution in Science (London, 1935)

Marx and Engels on Religion (London, 1935)

Marx/Engels: Selected Correspondence 1864-95 (London, 1934)

Besides these major works, articles and extracts of Marx's and Engels' works were being published in practically all of the radical journals and newspapers. By the end of the Thirties, with the exception of most of Marx's early work (including the Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844), almost all of their major works had been translated into English.

The economic and political crisis facing Britain and the threat of fascism and the Spanish Civil War, the prestige of Russia and the influence of Soviet critics, the availability of English translations of Marx's and Engels' works--all of these, as well as many other events and actions were elements which contributed to the rapid growth of the Left during the 1930's. The rise of the British Left and its relationship to Marxism have been well-documented, and there is no need to go over the same ground again. The intelligensia's, particularly the artists', position during this period has been sufficiently investigated by Professor Wood's Communism and the British Intellectuals and Donald Egbert's Social Radicalism and the Arts (pp. 492-534). However, almost nothing has been done in the specific area of literary criticism. Practically all of the histories of the period mention Christopher Caudwell as the best Marxist critic of the decade; although I believe this judgment essentially correct, still Caudwell was not working in a

vacuum. The same year which saw the publication of Caudwell's Illusion and Reality (1937) also saw the publication of Ralph Fox's The Novel and the People and Alick West's The Crisis and Criticism. As early as 1934, R. D. Charques had published his Contemporary Literature and Social Revolution, which was followed by Philip Henderson's Literature and A Changing Civilization (1935) and The Novel Today, Studies in Contemporary Attitudes (1936). Professor Hynes' assertion that "when Caudwell began to write Illusion and Reality in 1935, he had no English tradition of Marxist criticism on which to build" is simply not true.⁷⁹ Nor was Caudwell, as George Thomson claims, "the first to attempt a Marxist solution to the fundamental problems of aesthetics."⁸⁰

In order to assess Caudwell's achievement, it is necessary to examine the works of some of his Marxist predecessors. The point to be kept in mind while considering some of these critics is their emphasis on the function of literature as well as their specific criticisms of various authors. For it is in the work of these critics--in contrast to Morris' aesthetics--that the

⁷⁹ Samuel Hynes, "Introduction," in Christopher Caudwell, Romance and Realism: A Study in English Bourgeois Literature, ed. Samuel Hynes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), p. 16.

⁸⁰ George Thomson, "In Defense of Poetry," Modern Quarterly, 6, No. 2 (Spring, 1951), 123.

functional value of literature in the struggle for socialism begins to become a major concern. Many of the Marxian concepts that Morris had enunciated they develop and extend to the analysis of particular literary works; in addition, their works reveal the influence of the Russian critics, particularly Trotsky and Lenin. By the time Illusion and Reality was published, Marxist critics had shifted emphasis from a genetic to a functional approach to the relationship between art and society.

After William Morris' work, R. D. Charques' Contemporary Literature and Social Revolution (1933) is perhaps the first major work linking art and literature with economic conditions. It is an ambitious work which promises more than it really delivers. For example, Charques asks,

Can we discover, for example, between contemporary English literature and the present course of English politics a simple relation, whether of cause or effect, or of opposed ends, or of collaboration in a third and wider process? What is there to connect the present crisis in our political arrangements and in the social institutions deriving from them with say, the verse of Mr. Kipling and the novels of Mr. Wells and the plays of Mr. Shaw . . . the disintegrations of Mr. Joyce and the modernism of Mr. Eliot and the monthly choice of the Book Society and the criticism of the Times Literary Supplement? What part does contemporary literature play in the making of history and the urge towards social revolution?

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How does art fit into the arrangements of a society at a given phase of economic development? What sort of conditions are favourable to the poet or novelist or playwright, and what is his response to less favourable conditions? What is the point of

contact between his attitude to society and his impulse to create? And what, finally, is the effect of the thing that is created on the thing that exists? It is surely here that criticism fails most often and here that it could be of the strictest practical use.⁸¹

Charques does not take up all of these issues. For the most part he concentrates on the aesthetic-cognitive content of modern literature, making a number of broad generalizations about its present state with little support from concrete analysis of specific works. His central thesis is that the problem of modern literature is its narrow scope, its limited horizons. Modern literature concentrates too much on the individual; it has become a mere reflection of the artist's own ego. He argues that "the principle imaginative convention of the bourgeois novel--the exploration of the ego, the glorification of the individual consciousness--"⁸² and other forms of literature in which the artist's main concern is "expressing himself," is "the artistic counterpart to the economic doctrine of laissez-faire":

The more freely individual capitalist enterprise developed, the more plainly society lost what cohesion it had; and the loss of cohesion was reflected, needless to say, in literature and the writing of literature. From being rooted in a reality common to all men, poetry and the novel became more and more a vehicle for the expression of individuality. And individuality came to mean, in a large degree, artistic individuality.⁸³

⁸¹R. D. Charques, Contemporary Literature and Social Revolution (London: Martin Secker, 1933), pp. 9, 11.

⁸²Ibid., p. 91.

⁸³Ibid., pp. 125-26.

Like Morris, Charques objects to the focus on the individual life of the middle-class individual, preferring novels with a broad social range, as "rich in life and character as The Mill on the Floss."⁸⁴

Charques has read Trotsky, but in his methodology and approach, he is often closer to William Morris. His phrasing, for example, is closer to Morris' than it is to the "scientific" metaphors of the Russians. In discussing the relationship between literature and society, Charques sounds almost like Morris:

Men think as they do because their means of existence is what it is; the temper of their thoughts is borrowed from their source of livelihood. . . . Clearly, the more developed the economic struggle in society, the more obtrusively it is likely to find expression in literature. . . . Conflict is not less menacing for being ignored. [on Walpole's novels] If he has nothing to say of the extremes of privilege and poverty or of the passion of discontent they have bred, it is because . . . we must suppose, he desires nothing to be said. If his novels do not breathe a syllable of class struggle, it is scarcely because such struggle does not in fact exist, but rather because it has no ideal significance for him. . . . [Walpole's] sympathies are restricted to materially rosy conditions of society and the outlook on life which they begat. He would appear to be on the side of existing authority.⁸⁵

Unlike Marx and Morris, Charques does not directly link the creative process with man's praxis. He defines art as "communication," and from this definition deduces

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 125.

⁸⁵ Ibid., pp. 36-37.

its social basis.⁸⁶ However, in discussing Aldous Huxley's novels, he does say, "It is surely this divergence between the artist and society, between the creative and the labouring process, which accounts for the falsity of our aesthetic standards and for that barrenness of culture which Mr. Huxley prods and tickles so sceptically."⁸⁷ Moreover, like Morris and the Russian critics he attacks the doctrine of "art for art's sake":

Neither for the artist nor for any other man . . . is there such a thing in the existing organization of society as "political indifferentism;" nor perhaps has there ever been such a thing. In the modern world . . . the imaginative writer must inevitably throw in his lot for or against the existing order or society. Those writers who appear to be politically indifferent or who make a show of detachment are neither indifferent nor detached. For the most part they are the tacit supporters of the prevailing system, the intellectual or "ideological" props of the structure of society which still holds its ground. They are, in an obvious sense, the servants of the ruling, the propertied class, in capitalist society.

. . . Literature cannot be neutral. In fiction, as in fact, men and women must observe certain elementary social rules, and the manner in which they observe those rules is an indication of their sympathies. . . .⁸⁸

Again like Morris, Charques contrasts the literature of the past with the literature of the present. He finds that past literature was rooted in social "reality," that it was part of the common experience of all people. In

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 43.

⁸⁷ Charques, p. 103.

⁸⁸ Ibid., pp. 50-53.

addition, he observes,

In the past, the poem, not the poet, was the important thing; and if we no longer share that view it is because the order of society we have evolved has no use for it. It is an order of society in which social values are property values and individual success takes precedence over the common good; an order of society in which the writer like everyone else, must advertise his wares and lay out a claim to ownership in order to compete successfully in the struggle for existence. It is an order of society evolved by capitalist economy.⁸⁹

The only hope for society and art is in social revolution.

In discussing the distinctions between the "serious" novel and the "best-seller," Charques extends and enlarges on Morris' distinction between art and "popular amusements." He argues that the best-sellers "are not designed to reflect or interpret any sort of reality, that [they] are flagrantly untrue to experience, that [they] serve as an opiate for dulled imaginations." At the same time, he also observes that "the best seller, with a few notable exceptions, represents literary art for the mass of people. . . ."⁹⁰ Charques' chief objection to these novels is their anti-democratic sentiments and their complacency "in regard to the existing system of society and an indifference to common realities that are surely the special prerogatives of the story-teller in an age of decadence."⁹¹ Charques makes some interesting

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 160.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 85.

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 87.

distinctions between the popular and the serious novel:

The essential difference between the popular and the serious art of our day is that popular art is guided by bourgeois social standards, and serious art (or a great part of it) by the artistic values which spring from those standards. It is the acceptance of the ideal of social success which typifies the popular novel; it is the acceptance, perhaps a little more hesitating than it was, of the ideal of the good, the true and the beautiful, which typifies the novel of artistic purpose, which is indeed its chief source of strength.⁹²

Charques praises the modern novel for its "imagination, sympathy, humour, deep insight into personal relationships and a far greater technical mastery than the novelist has commanded hitherto"; at the same time, he argues that the modern novel "suffers from a want of social sensibility--or rather from a social sensibility that is too narrow and exclusive."⁹³

It is this narrowness that Charques finds typical of all modern literature. For example, the common element in all of T. S. Eliot's poems is Eliot's horror of vulgarity"; it is the "terror of vulgarity, the vulgarity of common things and common people [e.g., the "broken fingernails of dirty hands," "cheap hotels," "the young man carbuncular," etc.]: Eliot's poems are "ingenious; they are a symptom of the blight which descends on all cultivation of the spirit when it is removed from fellow

⁹²Ibid., p. 88.

⁹³Ibid., p. 89.

feeling. The poetry of aesthetic emotions, of aesthetic emotions alone, is a poetry stricken by a plague. . . .

The poet whose soul is too sensitive for traffic with ordinary humanity should consider shutting up shop."⁹⁴

T. S. Eliot's poetry as well as most of the poetry being written is "designed only for an enlightened and sophisticated taste, for souls as choice as the poet's and as familiar with the greatness of the past ages of poetry." Thus, modern poetry is "class poetry in the sense that it is addressed to a privileged and particularly cultivated section of society"; it is a poetry that "is perhaps a final stage in the growth of the individual tradition in art."⁹⁵

Much of Charques' criticism is valid and right to the point, but at times his views seem downright silly. Discussing Joyce's Ulysses, he remarks that Joyce "achieved completeness by omitting from this universe [of Ulysses] the most obvious of the material and impersonal forces of society. Deprived of almost all social meaning as well as stunted of ordinary humanity, Bloom's odyssey is a revelation of mediocrity and filth and frustration. Its 400,000 words are a swan-song of the individualistic canon of art."⁹⁶ However cogent some of his other observations

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 72.

⁹⁵ Ibid., pp. 76-77.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 92.

may be, one has the feeling that Charques is oversimplifying Joyce to a ridiculous degree.

A good deal of Charques' difficulty comes from his almost total focus on content to the elimination of other considerations. At a time when literary experiments in technique were of major concern, the best Charques can do with Virginia Woolf is to chide her for her escape into "contemplation" and for the lack of "material reality" in her novels; at the same time, all that he can do with D. H. Lawrence is to praise him for his hatred of civilization and his attack on capitalism: "It was Lawrence's passion of loathing for the cult of money and success and superiority and 'a system of grab' which his readers seldom perceived,"⁹⁷

Lawrence could not escape his own beginnings, his class-consciousness and the sense of reality which class-consciousness gives. Again and again in these little poems [Pansies] he invokes his kinship with the earth of common men. . . . He looks forward to the day of wrath, the day of revolution.⁹⁸

Or, in trying to understand why E. M. Forster had not written anything after his Passage to India, Charques concludes by saying "that modern conditions of life and society are not favourable to the exercise of his [Forster's] sensitive and balanced genius of sympathy."⁹⁹

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 118.

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 120.

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 124.

Charques' answers are too easy.

Charques' main contribution is his bringing into English literary criticism the discussion of the functional value of literature and its relation to social change. It is here that he goes beyond Morris, for as I have already noted, Morris does not see literature as instrumental in determining the social order. However, Charques does discuss this problem. Concerning the Victorian period, he says,

. . . the Victorian compromise was in fact not a compromise at all; it was merely an arrangement by which Church and State gave their blessing to the license of a property-owning class, employing a minimum of legislation to counteract the worst excesses of industrial organisation and a great variety of edifying maxims to reconcile the lower orders to their lot.

As to the literature of the period, Charques argues that,

Victorian literature made its contribution to that arrangement. Whatever the ideals to which novelists and social philosophers might subscribe, they seldom questioned the desirability of the system of capitalist relations. It was a fair rent and a fair interest that they stipulated as a condition of social well-being, not an end to the motive of private profit.¹⁰⁰

From Charques' point of view, Victorian literature assisted in maintaining the status quo. However, today, "social change in the modern world is clearly imperative,"¹⁰¹ and art and literature can help bring it about. "The intellectual," observes Charques, "cannot supply the class

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 162.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 176.

struggle with stimulus, for that grows out of the shaping of concrete events. But he can provide guidance, direction and policy":

Social revolution, if it is denied its literature, will be so much the less cultured and disciplined, so much the more uncontrollable. Where sympathy is lacking and conscience is cowardly, there violence takes root. If Victorian England was relatively peaceful, it was not merely because prosperity grew apace in the heyday of capitalism, but because literature gave expression to the democratic aspirations of society. Carlyle, Mill, Dickens, Charles Reade, Ruskin, Kingsley, Arnold, Morris, Swinburne did not create English democratic sentiment, which was born when the people of England acquired a common tongue and first met in common assembly; but they gave coherence to the thoughts and desires of the mass of men who lived in their time, and in so doing they cleared the ground for the practical foundations of political democracy.¹⁰²

Unfortunately, most modern writers are not revolutionary. The modern writer refuses to recognize that the class struggle exists; he does not want to become involved with politics. Charques compares Britain's intellectuals to the "condition of the larger section of the Russian intelligensia before 1917 . . . a similar disorganization of thought, a similar excitement and restlessness, a similar concentration of words and theories, a similar avoidance of practical issues--in a word, a similar decadence."¹⁰³ Charques concludes by arguing that "literature, the herald of revolt, has become the unconscious

¹⁰² Ibid., pp. 190-91.

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 182.

propaganda of ruling-class culture."¹⁰⁴

Charques recognizes the ideological function of literature. Unfortunately, he does not elaborate on this problem. He says that literature can "provide guidance, direction and policy" for the class struggle and the social revolution, but he does not say how literature can do this. If material conditions constitute reality, then what force does literature have? Why not science, religion, or philosophy as a guide for action? Charques does not show how the author's symbolic act and his creation can do anything to influence social action. Moreover, although he is concerned with the content of literature, he seldom attempts to relate the content of the work to its social function, or, when he does, he does not show how the work does what he says it does. How did Victorian literature assist the Church and the State in preserving the status quo? On a more general level, the problem seems to be that Charques has no theory of literature as such; again, like Morris, he relies on instinctive observations and common sense, which, in dealing with issues as complex as these, are insufficient.

In terms of breadth, understanding, and intellectual rigor, both of Philip Henderson's works, Literature and a Changing Civilization (1935) and particularly The Novel Today: Studies in Contemporary Attitudes (1936)

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 186.

indicate a significant advance beyond Charques' criticism. Henderson has read Charques as well as William Morris' Lectures, Marx, Engels, and Bukharin. Moreover, he is familiar with the criticism of T. S. Eliot, I. A. Richards, F. R. and Q. D. Leavis, and Edmund Wilson.¹⁰⁵ His methodological assumptions are clearly stated; in his critical, literary history he says, "The object of this book is to demonstrate that it is only by understanding the economic, and therefore the class structure of society, that any genuine understanding of the literature and thought of an age can be arrived at."¹⁰⁶ In his study of the contemporary novel, Henderson explains,

By the contemporary novel I mean the post-war novel. Taking this as my principal field of enquiry, I have tried to show what some of the more active minds of the present time are thinking and feeling in different countries and the changes that are taking place in the attitude of writers to their work. Since these attitudes are, it is maintained, traceable not so much to technical and aesthetic considerations but to beliefs arising out of the particular kind of social life a writer shares with his audience, my object has been to discover to what extent these beliefs are determined by the writer's position in relation to the society of his time.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ See "Short Bibliography," in Literature and a Changing Civilization (London: John Lane, 1935), p. 172.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 2. Henderson qualifies this statement in a footnote, saying that the economic structure and social consciousness are in "complicated interplay," but that culture "as superstructure" depends on the organization of society which, in turn, is "basically an economic organization."

¹⁰⁷ Philip Henderson, The Novel Today: Studies in Contemporary Attitudes (London: John Lane, 1936), p. 13.

In both cases, Henderson attempts to relate literature to the particular social order out of which it arises. The rationale behind this attempt is based on his Marxist assumption that

the kind of life a man leads, and therefore the kind of thoughts and feelings he has, is determined primarily by how he keeps himself alive. In the same way the form taken by the aggregate thoughts and feelings of any society, as expressed in its literature, philosophy and religion, will depend largely on how that society arranges for the production, distribution and exchange of those things which it considers most necessary for its continued existence.¹⁰⁸

However, just as in the case of Charques, Henderson promises more than he delivers. For one thing, he does not show that an understanding of the economic structure is the "only" way to arrive at a "genuine understanding" of literature. Secondly, he consistently fails--as does Charques--to relate the form of a work to any specific form of social relationships. Again, like Charques, he is content to relate only the content (which for Henderson means its major "ideas") of a work to contemporary social problems. The methodological problem is of course that Henderson has already decided in advance what the social problems are; it is a relatively easy matter to find them "reflected" in any work. On the other hand, some of his observations are fresh and interesting and, for the most part, substantiated by textual evidence. Furthermore,

¹⁰⁸Henderson, Literature, p. 1.

he raises a number of important issues which are relevant to a Marxian criticism.

In his Literature and a Changing Civilization, Henderson openly acknowledges the debt that Marxist literary criticism owes to William Morris, and many of his major themes are expansions of ideas that Morris had discussed. Like Marx and Morris, Henderson sees capitalism and bourgeois social relations as essentially hostile to the artist and his creations:

. . . the artist, cut off from social life, living more or less as an outcast in "bohemia," has become a kind of hothouse plant, an anomaly with an artistic temperament who has admittedly little or nothing to do with the serious business of life. The result is the appearance in our time of a succession of the obscure and subjective art-forms of coteries, "movements," which produce an artificial and bastard culture by imitating fragments of the various great traditions of the past. . . . Along with private enterprise in the economic sphere, the artist and writer is concerned above all things to sell his wares by building up "a name" for himself, by exploiting his individual peculiarities instead of disciplining such irrelevances in the expression of some thing greater than himself. All the great anonymous art of the past teaches but one lesson: that it is not the artist who matters, but his subject.¹⁰⁹

Like Morris, he is concerned with the developing elitism in art and the doctrine of art for art's sake:

. . . under industrial capitalism, modern literature and art, in becoming more and more difficult and obscure, more and more the intellectual preserve of a leisured minority, and in thus losing touch with the life of society as a whole, has tended to arrogate to itself a more or less disembodied

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 168.

existence in a distinctly high-class sphere called Culture--or to use F. R. Leavis' phrase, "minority culture," as distinct from "mass civilization" with its appalling and slimy sea of mass-produced reading matter that helps to keep the public so conveniently stupid. . . . The devotees of "minority culture" . . . their sole aim is to refine upon their already over-refined aesthetic sensibilities, to complicate still further their already complicated introspective minds, and by doing this they believe themselves to be defending the cause of Culture and Tradition.¹¹⁰

Henderson devoted a good deal of space in his first book to an attack on this position. Like Morris and Charques, Henderson is concerned with what he calls the "quite perceptible decline of culture,"¹¹¹ which he blames on the evils of capitalism, using William Morris' definition of art "as the result of man's joy in his work" and his assertion that the division of labour has "destroyed every remnant of charm in man's work and turned it into a hated toil."¹¹²

Just as Morris and Charques before him, Henderson discusses the effect of bad art on the masses. For example, drama "among the working class . . . is seldom anything but music-hall dope, an opportunity for wallowing in beery and sexy fantasies, or witnessing over and over again the monotonous subject of adultery among their 'betters.'"¹¹³ However, Henderson goes further than

¹¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 1-2.

¹¹¹ Henderson, Literature, p. 152.

¹¹² Ibid., pp. 152, 153.

¹¹³ Ibid., p. 104.

Morris or Charques and analyzes the effect of specific forms of mass culture on the general populace. The function of the popular press "is to provide its readers with as many 'sensations' a day as possible"; journalism is "the art of presenting events in such a way that they are at once exciting and vapid, for it would never do for the public to become too conscious of what their rulers are up to."¹¹⁴ Henderson has an interesting discussion of the crime and detective novel which he traces back to the "picaresque novel of the sixteenth century and the rogue-books which provided pabulum for the lower middle classes." However, there is an important difference between the picaresque novel and the detective novel:

The difference is that the rogue is always quite frankly the hero of the old picaresque tale and the reader was not invited to share the vicarious excitement of a prolonged man-hunt by the guardians of private property, but could enter into a series of usually gay and reckless adventures and so achieve a certain emotional release. The modern crime and detective book has precisely the opposite effect. Nowadays one is invited to hate the criminal (whose motives for committing the crime are, of course, not too deeply analyzed) and the heroes are the police. . . . The detective novel serves the useful purpose, by deadening natural human sympathy with misfortune, of preparing the way for all the undisguised brutalities of fascist rule.¹¹⁵

Henderson also attacks the "'clean, gripping love story'" for its commercialism, "cheap emotionalism," and racism--

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p. 105.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 105-06.

"foreigners, and particularly coloured races, are represented as inferior, and we read much of the 'relentless cruelty of the Oriental mind'"--concluding that, for the most part, these books "serve the useful purpose of stimulating commercialized sex, snobbery, nationalism and race prejudice."¹¹⁶ As for the best-sellers that "aspire to a certain literary level," those of "the Walpole and Priestly type," Henderson argues that they are the natural outcome of the capitalist mentality:

. . . it is not the intrinsic value of the book that counts nowadays so much as the spurious value created for it by various literary cliques, . . . or the reputation built up for it by reviews that have been quite simply bought by the amount of advertising space booked by the publisher. Thus we have a pernicious capitalisation of spiritual values comparable to the artificial stimulation of prices by the Trusts and Combines of Big Business.¹¹⁷

The important thing to note in the above discussion is how Henderson is relating a specific literary form to a specific social function--e.g., the detective novel and the "true romance"--; he is analyzing the ideological function of literature by trying to understand how a specific form determines social action. For Henderson, "all art, which comes into being through the resolution of a conflict in the author's mind will be 'propaganda' for a certain attitude to life" (and, as

¹¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 106-07.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 107.

Kenneth Burke says, attitude is "incipient act").¹¹⁸

Thus, Henderson explains that he is interested in "the 'ends' to which any writer leads us, and only secondarily the 'means' which he employs, although on further investigation it appears that the latter is only another aspect of the former." He argues that this approach has certain advantages:

When we come to look at literature in this way, it will be found that form cannot be so readily distinguished from content, for an author's treatment, method, or 'aesthetic,' proceeding from his general viewpoint, will directly determine the choice and selection, and therefore the form, of his material. We see, therefore, that the usual distinction between form and content, means and ends, is false, for one could scarcely exist without the other. In the same way, a consideration of the 'aesthetic' of a work, isolated from its general ideological content, will be equally barren, for there can be no essential division between literature as art and literature as social experience.¹¹⁹

This does not mean that Henderson judges all writers in terms of their ideas; for example, he argues that W. B. Yeats, a political reactionary, "towers above all others as the greatest poet of his age,"¹²⁰ and that Virginia Woolf, despite her "aloofness," creates "lovely and unpopular novels," and "apart from Joyce, from whom of course she derives, there is no other contemporary novelist who has such a subtle registration of the psychological overtones of different people in a room, or gives

¹¹⁸Henderson, The Novel Today, p. 16.

¹¹⁹Ibid., p. 16.

¹²⁰Ibid., p. 17.

one such a sense of the strangeness of life."¹²¹ On the whole, however, in both of his critical studies, Henderson does tend to judge most authors in terms of aesthetic-cognitive criteria. He attempts to understand the author's attitude and where the author is "leading us."

Henderson feels the pressure of contemporary events, especially what he considers to be the danger of fascism and Nazism. In his second work, which deals with the contemporary novel, he seems more and more to judge a writer in terms of his stance toward political issues and the degrees of his commitment. His treatment of Joyce is a good example. In his first book, he heaps praise on the Irish novelist, claiming that "from the first Joyce came to grips with the major problems of life without shirking even the sordidness incident to city life."¹²² He even accepts Stephen Daedalus' (whom he considers to be Joyce) aesthetic theory that art ought to "'induce an esthetic stasis, an ideal pity, or an ideal terror, a stasis called forth, prolonged and at last dissolved by . . . the rhythm of beauty.'" Henderson calls this "the essential quality of art itself and there can scarcely be any art without it":

For it is obvious that literature is not just an accurate record of events, any more than good painting is just an accurate representation of

¹²¹ Ibid., p. 127.

¹²² Henderson, Literature, p. 147.

the world. Although we admire Greek art and poetry for its essential truth to common human experience, it gives us at the same time a world slightly idealized, though by no means falsified, for it is the expression of collective, rather than individual, emotions and beliefs.¹²³

As for Ulysses, Henderson praises its panoramic scope and its complete characterization; he says that the novel is "not only one of the most moral, but also one of the greatest achievements in our literature."¹²⁴

In his next book Henderson does an about face.

Quoting Stephen's words again, he says,

A statement such as this, roundly and pompously phrased, frequently passes as aesthetic criticism. If we look at it more closely, however, we shall discover that it means precisely nothing. Joyce begs the whole question at the onset by the phrase "Beauty expressed by the artist." An artist of any significance does not express "beauty," he expresses life, or rather that section of life known to him through his experience. In so far as he draws away from his experience and endeavors to express abstractions he fails to produce anything of lasting importance. Joyce, however, would have it that the function of the artist is to express something called "beauty" in such a way as to form another abstraction--"an aesthetic stasis"--which in turn "cannot awaken in us an emotion which is kinetic." That is, he would abolish at a stroke the dynamic effects of art, its sole reason for existence, for it an artist fails to make us share his own emotion he fails altogether--in favour of some sterile aesthetic absolute.¹²⁵

Discussing Ulysses, Henderson asks, "Is there not something profoundly cynical in the very disproportion

¹²³ Ibid., p. 148.

¹²⁴ Ibid., p. 150.

¹²⁵ Henderson, The Novel Today, p. 82.

between the tremendous effort expended by Joyce and the result achieved?" He argues that the Homeric parallels in Ulysses only emphasize its pettiness and triviality. He concludes by saying that "James Joyce is the standing example of a great artist infected by the decay and disintegration of the society in which he lives, a society in which there is no place for the creative artist and in which the most splendid powers of the mind can be directed only to the most trivial ends."¹²⁶

Henderson's change of attitude toward Joyce seems to have been brought about by his increasing concern with the functional aspects of literature. In his first critical work, which is essentially literary history, he focuses on the relationship between the artist and his social environment. For example, he analyzes the effect of the French Revolution on Wordsworth's poetry, its themes and its diction. Or, he compares an author's treatment of a theme with the "actual" historical situation. For example, he says that "while Scott wrote romantically about Scotland in the Middle Ages he diverted attention from the real condition of the Highland Gaels at that time."¹²⁷ It is for this reason "conservative journals had good reason to encourage the reading of Sir Walter

¹²⁶ Ibid., p. 85.

¹²⁷ Henderson, Literature, pp. 78-79.

Scott."¹²⁸ Henderson is raising an important question: to what degree is the writer responsible for interpreting the events of his own time? In his second work, Henderson is much more concerned with the social function of literature itself. The historical development of the novel, Henderson explains, "has been towards an increasing directness of approach to human, and therefore social, problems, and that the constant aim of one great writer after another has been, whatever his subject, to give man a greater understanding of himself, and his environment, each achieving in turn a self-knowledge hitherto unequalled. And this process was achieved for the most part by the intense struggles on the part of the writer, not only with the inertia and instinct for conservatism and acceptance within himself, but with the habits and outworn conventions of his environment."¹²⁹ For Henderson, the function of the revolutionary writer "is not only to see life whole, but, by his realization of the conflicts and contradictions in the present, to see what life is becoming."¹³⁰ If the writer is equal to his task, he will produce a "revolutionary novel," which Henderson defines as,

¹²⁸Henderson, loc. cit.

¹²⁹Henderson, The Novel Today, pp. 35-36.

. . . not simply the novel which deals with political revolution. Every book which shows society as a changing and developing process, rather than as a static structure, is, in one sense at least, revolutionary. The Way of All Flesh, for example, is such a novel, Barchester Towers is not. Today, however, novels of this kind tend to be largely political, for it is in politics and economics that the fundamental changes of our time are taking place. To ignore these things, to pretend that they are not taking place and that each one of us is not in some way part of them, is to ignore reality. And for a novelist this is disastrous. . . . The revolutionary novel . . . begins with a conception of society as divided against itself in the struggle of the classes. To this end, it recognizes the interdependence of individual and social problems, of aesthetic and politics, and in its attempt to co-ordinate activities and spheres of thought that are usually regarded as isolated from one another, it sets itself to achieve a more comprehensive and, in that sense, a truer view of the world than that presented by the bourgeois romantic novel.¹³¹

Henderson argues that "the purpose of the most vital novel is and always has been to change mankind, and through mankind, society. And so in a tragic and revolutionary age like our own, when politics have so largely superseded the problems of ethics and religion in most active minds, it is only to be expected that the change aimed at by our most vital novelists should be a political one."¹³² Obviously, Henderson is loading his argument; if the novelist is not committed to changing man and society, through political revolution, then he and his work are not "vital." Henderson is thoroughly convinced

¹³¹Ibid., pp. 83, 84.

¹³²Ibid., p. 15; italics mine.

that "it is the duty of the writer, as writer, "actively to assist . . . towards bringing [a reasonable society, i.e., communism] into being."¹³³

It is not surprising then that Stephen Daedalus' emphasis on the "stasis" inducing effect of art would be distasteful to Henderson, who is arguing for the political commitment of the artist and the use of art as a weapon in a revolutionary struggle. According to Henderson, the very medium of the novel, prose, is primarily "an instrument of the rational intelligence."¹³⁴ Historically it has been associated with the language of empirical science and the rise of the bourgeoisie. Using this medium, the novelist can give the reader valid insights into the true nature of individual and social reality. It can thus modify the consciousness of both the writer and the reader, and this modified consciousness (if given the "correct" picture of reality) has revolutionary potential. The purpose of the novel is to "change" mankind and not to produce I. A. Richards' "synesthesia" or Joyce's "stasis."

Henderson communicates the urgent need for change. He sees in the rise of fascism the possibility of worldwide

¹³³ Ibid., p. 52.

¹³⁴ Ibid., p. 45. Poetry, Henderson says, was first used as a means of making labor pleasant, "and later becoming associated with festivals of song and dance" was used "as a means of uniting these communities into self-conscious units" (pp. 45-46).

catastrophe. He says, "We continue with our literary discussions as though we, and the civilization we represent, were immortal. Yet the question that outweighs all others at the present time is whether or not, in a year or so, any of us will be alive to read any books at all."¹³⁵ It seems to me that it is Henderson's sense of crisis and his feeling that revolutionary action is urgently called for which precipitates his change in attitude toward Joyce. Henderson attaches no particular value to proletarian literature, and he attacks the Stalinist doctrine of Proletcult; however, he feels that given the circumstances (in 1935) some political commitment is necessary. His highest praise is reserved for those writers with "unclouded vision," those writers that can see the "truth" and can use their talents as writers to communicate this reality forcefully and aesthetically (for Henderson, of course, the closer they are to Marxism, the closer they are to the "truth").

Henderson argues passionately for his cause and defends his approach against other critics. He attacks T. S. Eliot and I. A. Richards for attempting to sever literature from social action. Eliot, "together with I. A. Richards, . . . has evolved a somewhat confused critical

¹³⁵ Ibid., p. 49.

philosophy of elaborate evasion in support of his non-committal attitude." Henderson quotes from Eliot's The Sacred Wood; Eliot says,

My meaning is, that a poet has not a personality to express but a particular medium, which is only a medium and not personality. . . . Impressions and experiences which are important for the man may take no place in the poetry, and those which become important in the poetry may play a quite negligible part in the man, the personality.¹³⁶

Henderson argues that this "is a plea for nineteenth-century poesie-pur and art-for-art's-sake, although, as always with Eliot, he may not exactly intend this."¹³⁷

Henderson denounces I. A. Richards' assertion that the poet's business is not to make "true" statements but "pseudo-statements." Henderson observes,

So that when writing poetry Richards advises us to "cut our pseudo-statements free from belief, and yet retain them, in this released state, as the main instruments by which we order our attitudes to one another and the world." According to him the only way we can achieve "sincerity" is by being conscious of our insincerity--to such quibbling shifts are the chief writers of our day driven in justification of their aloof and dignified posture on the critical fence!¹³⁸

Likewise, Henderson attacks Wyndham Lewis' doctrine of "the non partisan principle of the "party of genius" (i.e., the intellectuals), observing that this results in

¹³⁶T. S. Eliot, The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism (1920 rpt. London: Methuen, 1960), p. 56.

¹³⁷Henderson, Literature, pp. 111-12.

¹³⁸Ibid., p. 112.

the intelligensia's becoming "a passive instrument of whatever society it happens to find itself in" (including Hitler's Germany).¹³⁹

Henderson also criticizes John Middleton Murry's "private communism of the heart," and his interpretation of D. H. Lawrence's sexual themes.¹⁴⁰ He objects to E. M. Forster's Aspects of the Novel for its lack of historical perspective; he argues that

Mr. Forster is not concerned with the conditions under which writers produce, and have produced, the conditions, in other words, that make the work possible. He would much rather think of them sitting comfortably in the British Museum, having simultaneous existence in eternity, and quotes T. S. Eliot to the effect that it is the business of the critic "to see literature steadily and to see it whole," and this is eminently to see it not as consecrated by time, but to see it beyond time.¹⁴¹

Concerning Virginia Woolf's critical perspective in Mr. Bennet and Mrs. Brown, Henderson accuses her of playing "the same metaphysical game of hide and seek as Mr. Forster."¹⁴² Her criticism of John Galsworthy and Arnold Bennett demonstrated an essentially escapist attitude: "She [Woolf] does not want to be reminded that the world does not consist entirely of Mrs. Dalloways shopping in

¹³⁹ Ibid., p. 139.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 141.

¹⁴¹ Henderson, The Novel Today, p. 22.

¹⁴² Ibid., p. 24.

Bond Street and giving dinner parties in Westminster."¹⁴³

Finally, Henderson opposes the whole critical trend away from historical criticism to psychological criticism:

Historical criticism has, to some extent at least, always recognized the social roots of culture. But of more recent years, by isolating for analysis the mental states to which literature gives rise, all the emphasis has shifted from the environment to the individual consciousness. As a result criticism has retired from the world at large to the "inner world" of the psychiatrist's consulting room and the novel itself has come to be regarded as primarily a form of self-analysis. . . . the mental sickness of the individual can only be a reflection of social ills that many modern writers are not prepared to pay.¹⁴⁴

Later, in his discussion of Freud and Jung, Christopher Caudwell takes up this problem in much greater detail. It is sufficient here to note that Henderson certainly does not demonstrate the superiority of a Marxist approach. It is one thing to assert that all mental problems are a "reflection" of social problems, but it is quite another thing to support the assertion with convincing evidence.

It is, of course, impossible, to discuss all of Henderson's specific analyses of individual authors. In terms of other Marxists writing at the same time, his judgments are rather orthodox--e.g., his almost obligatory and violent attacks on Eliot and Wyndham Lewis and his praise of Lawrence's attack on bourgeois society--and are similar to Charques. In his Novel Today, he demonstrates a catholic taste and shows a perceptiveness of

¹⁴⁴Ibid., p. 14.

insight (see especially his discussion of Proust) uncommon among his fellow Marxists. Like Charques, he is methodologically closer to the Russian critics, especially Trotsky and Lenin, than he is to Marx's and Engels' broader and more philosophic approach. Just as Charques before him, Henderson makes little or no attempt to lay the foundations for his Marxist perspective (although in his Literature and a Changing Civilization he says this is precisely what he wants to demonstrate). He simply asserts that it is the superior method. Hence, Marxism as a theory of reality and as a method of literary analysis is posited but never logically or empirically validated. Henderson supplies a good deal of textual evidence for his judgments, but one has the feeling that the judgments were arrived at before the reading rather than derived from the reading of the works themselves. There is nothing wrong with a critic having a theory of literature before he attempts to interpret a text; indeed, he must have one (even if it is fragmentary and only half-conscious), but Henderson is often guilty of an extreme reductionism; he reduces the work to its simplest terms in order for it to fit the theory. Further, like Charques, Henderson is more concerned with content (the author's ideas and attitudes) than he is with form. Hence, when he discusses the functional value of literature, he can do no more than assert that literature can give man

insight into reality, which for him is primarily economic and political. Henderson fails to understand that form follows function. Revolution takes specific forms, and the question is not how literature gives insight into reality (other symbolic systems do this as well as literature) but how literature determines the form of this specific social action.

Although Ralph Fox does not come to grips with this particular problem, he does attempt to defend Marxism as a viable methodology. His The Novel and the People (1937) is dedicated to the proposition that Marxism is the only world view worth considering, both for the writer and for the critic. Fox is well qualified for his role as a spokesman for a Marxist world view. Before writing The Novel and the People, he had served at the Marx-Engels Institute in Moscow and had written several books on Marxism--Colonial Policy on British Imperialism (1933), Marx and Engels on the Irish Question (1933), The Class Struggle in Britain 2 vols (1934), Communism (1935), Marxism and Modern Thought (1935), Essays in Historical Materialism (1935)--as well as a biography of Lenin (Lenin: A Biography [1933]). In his study of the novel he brings a sophisticated knowledge of Marxism to bear on the evolution of a specific genre. The object of the study, Fox explains, is "to examine the present position of the English novel, to try to understand the crisis of

ideas which has destroyed the foundation on which the novel seemed once to rest so securely, and to see what is its future."¹⁴⁵

Fox views the "crisis of ideas" from several different aspects. First, he claims that contemporary novels "do not deal with reality"; authors try to "picture a real world, but the amount of reality achieved, . . . is not sufficient to produce that violent shock which brings us, all our emotions taut, our mind alert, into the country of those who see, and having seen through their eyes, we never forget the experience."¹⁴⁶ Second, there is a crisis in outlook among the novelists themselves, and this "crisis of outlook is concerned with philosophy, and therefore with form." The problem is that most writers are seeking refuge in pseudo-philosophies, religion, fascism, or psychoanalysis. Concerning the latter, Fox says,

Since the War the philosophical outlook of most English writers has been deeply influenced by the last of European liberals, Sigmund Freud. Psychoanalysis, as developed by Freud, is the apotheosis of the individual, the extreme of intellectual anarchy. It has certainly affected the English novel in the last twenty years more than any other body of ideas. It has also brought it to a state of almost complete intellectual bankruptcy, even

¹⁴⁵ Ralph Fox, The Novel and the People, 2nd ed. (1937 rpt. London: Cobbett Press, 1948), p. 19.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 21.

though some strikingly original work also owes much of its force to the revelation of the individual made possible by Freudian analysis.¹⁴⁷

The third aspect of the crisis is the indifference of many writers to the pressing social questions of the time and their failure to enlist in the cause of social revolution. (Fox himself was killed in the Spanish Civil War.) He says that writers must "understand that they live in a time in which nothing less than the fate of humanity is being decided."¹⁴⁸

All of these aspects of the crisis can be seen as a product of a more general movement--the retreat from, and, as a consequence, the decay of realism. Fox defines art as an "extension of consciousness,"¹⁴⁹ a grasping of "the knowledge of truth, of reality. Art is one of the means by which man grapples with and assimilates reality":

On the forge of his own inner consciousness the writer takes the white-hot metal of reality and hammers it out, refashions it to his own purpose, beats it out madly by the violence of thought.
 . . .¹⁵⁰

The writer "must be concerned only with truth," but as Fox argues, "To understand, to know reality, it is necessary to have a theory of knowledge corresponding to truth.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 25.

¹⁴⁸ Fox, loc. cit.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 19.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., pp. 37-38.

And truth is not abstract and motionless, to be discovered by a formally logical and abstract process of thought, or even, . . . intuition. Truth can only be reached through practical activity, for truth is the expression of man's own intense investigation of an object, and that investigation is above all a human activity, particularly a social and productive activity."¹⁵¹ Thus, truth is discovered in praxis, and for Fox, "without Marxism there is no approach to that essential truth which is the chief concern of the writer."¹⁵²

The novel is one means the writer has of getting at the "essential truth." Evolving from the epic, which gives a more complete picture of society than the novel, the novel's development corresponds historically to society's increasing interest in the individual. In contrast to the epic and modern forms such as the cinema, the novel has "the advantage of being able to give a complete picture of man, of being able to show that important inner life, as distinct from the purely dramatic man, the acting man."¹⁵³ The novel "is the epic of the struggle of the individual against society, against nature, and it could only develop in a society where the balance between man and society was lost, where man was at war with his

¹⁵¹ Ibid., pp. 40-41.

¹⁵² Ibid., p. 40.

¹⁵³ Ibid., p. 43.

fellows or with nature. Such a society is capitalist society."¹⁵⁴ The problem is that the novel is no longer fulfilling its function. Paradoxically, the growth of capitalism with its "minute subdivision of labour and the increasing exploitation of man by man which followed on the establishment of machine industry" (Fox praises Ruskin and Morris here for these insights) has resulted in "a general decay of art" and "the degradation of the artist himself, crushed by the seemingly insoluble contradiction between the individual and society."¹⁵⁵ Fox explains,

Capitalist society as it has developed, has placed the artist in a totally different position from that which he occupied in all preceding social systems. In its early period, from the Renaissance to the middle of the eighteenth century, this was not so obvious. The writer was still free to see man as he is, to give a whole picture of him, and to criticize the present as well as the mediaeval past. In short, capitalism, which made man the centre of art, also in the end destroyed the conditions in which realism can flourish and only permitted man to appear in art, particularly in the novel, in a castrated or perverted form.¹⁵⁶

Fox praises the early Continental novelists, especially Rabelais and Cervantes and argues that in the eighteenth century the novel, in the hands of a writer such as Fielding, was "a weapon" by which "the best, most imaginative representatives of the bourgeois examined the new man [i.e., the new, emerging bourgeois] and women

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 44.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., pp. 46-47.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 46.

and the society in which they lived."¹⁵⁷

These writers had a great deal of confidence in man, and, although they were not afraid to depict man's savagery and society's injustices, they believed that he was capable of mastering his world. At the same time there was a "dualism" in the novels of the eighteenth century. Writers such as Fielding and Smollett were "concerned with a purely objective picture of the world," while men such as Richardson and Sterne concentrated on the "inner life." Taken together these novelists "compelled man to understand that the individual had an inner life as well as an outer life."¹⁵⁸ Fox has rather harsh criticism for what he believes is Sterne's egotism and his inability to create characters that live in the real world; however, it is capitalism that has distorted this dualism and made it one sided:

The fact is that neither the view of Fielding on reality nor the view of Richardson and Sterne is a complete one. The exclusion of sentiment and analysis, the failure to see the subjective side of the individual, deprived the novel of imagination and fantasy, just as the centering of all action in the individual consciousness deprived it of its epic quality. Such division in Cervantes was unthinkable. It was the creation of a fully-developed capitalistic society which had completed the separation of the individual from society, just as the subdivision of individuals themselves in the completion of its minute and complex division of social labour.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 60.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 62.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 60.

It is in the latter half of the eighteenth century and the nineteenth century with the triumph of industrial capitalism and the growth of a mass, literate audience composed largely of the bourgeois that the development of the novel "came to a sudden halt."¹⁶⁰

Fox argues that by the nineteenth century English novelists found it impossible to portray people as they really were:

The difficulty was that the Victorian writer could not discuss the real relations between men and women without tearing the veil off the real relations between man and man in society. This was the period of the workhouses, the hungry forties, the Chartist strikes, the Newport rising, the period when for the first time in English history since 1688 a change in the fundamental law of the country was carried through under threat of armed force. It was the period of the worship of money and success. . . . It was a time of rapacious materialism in public and private life covered by the sickliest hypocritical cloak of idealism. If you told the truth about the Victorian family you could hardly avoid telling the truth about these other aspects also. . . .¹⁶¹

It is not simply that the writers would not look honestly at their society but that they could not. Neither Scott nor Dickens "could see through the surface respectability of their society to the progressive degradation of man going on beneath. Because they could not see this process, neither could they truly see the real glory of their contemporaries, the heroic character of their

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 62.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., p. 67.

times."¹⁶² Even Dickens, who Fox claims, "restored the novel to its full epic character,"¹⁶³ made a "compromise with romanticism." Instead of picturing reality as it was, he gave in to his readers and "chose the easier method of sentimentalizing reality."¹⁶⁴

Along with the position of the writer, it is the appearance of this vast middle class audience that destroyed the epic nature of the novel and prevented it from exploring and communicating the reality of Victorian society. Fox discusses the pressure of the public on Dickens and Hardy and the criminal proceedings against Flaubert, the Goncourts and Zola, concluding,

"Society," by which we mean the ruling class, could not allow the moral perversion of "the public," though it was itself perverting it morally and spiritually with all the immense resources at its command. The author who would continue the grand tradition of the English novel was no longer able to sit apart and observe the life of the nation, to be angry, ironical, pitiful and cruel as occasion demanded.¹⁶⁵

At the same time, with the increasing division of labor, the traditional form of the novel "disintegrates as it becomes more specialized." Instead of novels of the scope of, say Tom Jones, there appears the comic novel, the adventure novel, the "novel of the open road," the

¹⁶²Ibid., p. 68.

¹⁶³Fox, p. 67.

¹⁶⁴Ibid., p. 71.

¹⁶⁵Fox, loc. cit.

detective novel, etc." "Where Cervantes could combine imagination and poetry with humour and fantasy, we now have the purely imaginative and poetic novel, the purely humorous and fantastic. Certainly the attempt finally to divide the subjective from the objective attitude to life, already clear in the eighteenth century, is suspended till our day, the period of the crisis of the individual. On the whole, however, the nineteenth century is the period of the break-up of the traditional form."¹⁶⁶

The consequences of this nineteenth-century retreat from realism which was the result of the total triumph of capitalism are that "human personality . . . has disappeared from the contemporary novel, and with it the hero."¹⁶⁷ Huxley, Lawrence, Wells, Joyce, Proust no longer portray heroes or villains:

The modern novelist, abandoning the creation of personality, of a hero, for the minor tasks of rendering ordinary people in ordinary circumstances, has thereby abandoned both realism and life itself. This is true not only of the professed realists of the "objective" school, but also of the novelists of purely subjective psychological analysis. Indeed, the latter can claim the credit for having reduced the creation of character to absurdity, even though to an occasionally magnificent and talented absurdity, for James Joyce is so determined to portray the ordinary man that he takes the most ordinary, "mean" man he can find in Dublin, and so intent is he on picturing him in "ordinary"

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., pp. 71-72.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 89.

circumstances that he introduces his hero perched on the closet seat.¹⁶⁸

For Fox, this is a "denial of humanism, of the whole Western tradition of literature in literature":

. . . it is an approach which in the end kills creation by denying the historical character of man. Indeed, the bourgeoisie cannot any longer accept man in time, man acting in the world, man changed by the world and man changing the world, man actively creating himself--historical man, because such acceptance implies condemnation of the bourgeois world, recognition of the historical fate of capitalism and of the forces at work in society which are changing it.¹⁶⁹

Along with destruction of personality "has gone the destruction of the novel's structure, its epic character":

Man is no longer the individual will in conflict with other wills and personalities, for to-day all conflict must be overshadowed by the immense social conflicts shaking and transforming modern life, and so conflict also disappears from the novel, being replaced by subjective struggles, sexual intrigues, or abstract discussion.¹⁷⁰

This brings Fox back to the "crisis in the outlook of the novelists themselves." Without a comprehensive world view, no complete "understanding of life and free expression of human personality is possible. The novel cannot find new life, humanism cannot be reborn, until such an outlook has been attained. That outlook today can only be the outlook of dialectical materialism, giving birth to a new

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 90.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 91.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 97.

Socialist realism."¹⁷¹ The novelist must take Fielding's advice and have the faculty of "'penetrating into all things within our reach and knowledge, and of distinguishing their essential differences.'" And Fox argues that "to-day penetration into the essential differences must mean the revelation of those contradictions which are the motive forces of human actions, both the inner contradictions in a man's character and those external contradictions with which they are inextricably connected."¹⁷² This will involve the writer's use of Freudian psychology, but, more importantly, he must comprehend the Marxian dialectic in order to see man in his full development within society. In the present day, the novelist's duty is clear:

It is the central task of the English novelist to restore man to the place that belongs to him in the novel, to put in a complete picture of man, to understand and imaginatively re-create every phase of the personality of contemporary man. . . . [the new realism] must show man not merely critical, or man at hopeless war with a society he cannot fit into as an individual, but man in action to change his conditions, to master life, man in harmony with the course of history and able to become lord of his own destiny.¹⁷³

Fox is not arguing for proletarian literature, which he says is "scarcely more than a disguised political

¹⁷¹Fox, loc. cit.

¹⁷²Ibid., p. 103.

¹⁷³Ibid., p. 100.

tract."¹⁷⁴ He is arguing for a "Marxian view of realism"¹⁷⁵ which can include such writers as Shakespeare, Aeschylus, Aristophanes, Dante, Cervantes, and Balzac. Fox explains his position,

What Marx and Engels did insist upon . . . was that a work of art should conform to its author's outlook on the world, since only that outlook could give it artistic unity. But the author's own views must never obtrude. . . . It is not the author's business to preach, but to give a real, historical picture of life.¹⁷⁶

Fox, however, seems to have worked himself into a corner. If capitalism has indeed fragmented man, alienated him, dehumanized him, made him a victim of forces over which he no longer has control, then this "new realism" that Fox proposes would be a false picture of reality. Given Fox's analysis of society, those novels which Fox attacks, the ones which depict the disintegration of human relationships, which picture man isolated from his fellow human beings, bound together with them by sheer cash-nexus and at the mercy of impersonal bureaucratic capitalistic organizations are a true picture of reality. To create a character who is in control of his situation, who is "lord of his own destiny," would be to falsify reality. For Fox's "new realism" to conform to reality, there must be created a new reality, a new situation, a different society.

¹⁷⁴Ibid., p. 107.

¹⁷⁵Fox, loc. cit.

¹⁷⁶Ibid., pp. 108, 109.

For the most part, however, The Novel and the People is an excellent example of Marxist criticism. Moreover, Fox is not content merely to assert the superiority of the method. Throughout the book Fox makes use of the writings of Marx and Engels and goes to great lengths to explain his own assumptions. In the second chapter, he takes up a number of objections to the Marxist approach. For example, in dealing with the question of the relationship between the base and the superstructure, Fox quotes both Marx and Engels to demonstrate that they "never for a moment considered that the connection between the two was a direct one, easily observed and mechanically developing."¹⁷⁷ He says,

Changes in the material basis of society, Marx rightly urged, can be determined by the economic historian with the precision of natural science (which, of course, is not the same thing as saying that these changes are scientifically determined). But no such scientific measurement of the resulting changes in the social and spiritual superstructure of life is possible. The changes take place, men become conscious of them, they "fight out" the conflict between old and new in their minds, but do so unevenly, burdened by all kinds of past heritage, often unclearly, and always in such a way that it is not easy to trace the changes in men's minds.¹⁷⁸

Fox adds that "Marxism . . . while reserving the final and decisive factor in any change for economic causes, does not deny that 'ideal' factors can also influence

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 29.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., pp. 29-30.

the course of history and may even preponderate in determining the form which changes will take (but only the form)."¹⁷⁹

Fox also defends Marxism against the charge that it neglects the individual. He argues that "Marxism places man in the centre of its philosophy, for while it claims that material forces may change man, it declares most emphatically that it is man who changes the material forces and that in the course of so doing he changes himself."¹⁸⁰ Fox clearly sees the Marxism emphasis on man's praxis. He quotes from Engels:

. . . there are innumerable intersecting forces, an infinite series of parallelograms of forces which give rise to one resultant--the historical event. This again may itself be viewed as the product of a power which, taken as a whole, works unconsciously and without volition. For what each individual wills is obstructed by everyone else, and what emerges is something that no one willed. . . . But from the fact that individual wills--of which each desires what he is impelled to by his physical constitution and external, in the last resort economic circumstances (either his own personal circumstances or those of society in general)--do not attain what they want, but are merged into a collective mean, a common resultant, it must not be concluded that their value = 0. On the contrary, each contributes to the resultant and is to this degree involved in it.¹⁸¹

Fox explains that Engels' concept can be used by the novelist as well as the historian:

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 31.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 32.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., p. 33.

For the one concern of the novelist is, or should be, this question of the individual will in its conflict with other wills on the battleground of life. It is the fate of man that his desires are never fulfilled, but it is also his glory, for in the effort to obtain their fulfillment he changes, be it ever so little, in ever so limited degree, life itself.¹⁸²

Fox emphasizes that from the Marxist point of view that is not a "conflict of abstract human beings," but of real people. Man's desires and actions are, for the most part, determined by his social relations, which, in turn, are determined by his economic circumstances, either personal or societal. Fox further points out that in terms of social history, it is "the class to which he [man] belongs, the psychology of that class, with its contradictions and conflicts, which plays a determining part."¹⁸³

In addition, Fox also rejects the assertion that Marxism pays little or no attention to the formal problems of art. He replies that "it is completely foreign to the spirit of Marxism to neglect the formal side of art. To Marx form and content were inextricably connected, inter-related by the dialectic of life, and for the novelist of Socialist realism formal questions are of first importance."¹⁸⁴ In discussing the "question of atmosphere," for example, Fox argues that Marxism, by articulating an organic relationship between man and his

¹⁸²Fox, loc. cit.

¹⁸³Ibid., pp. 33-34.

¹⁸⁴Ibid., p. 130.

environment, forces the writer to conceive of his characters and their surroundings in a unified, dialectical relationship. In matters of style, Fox believes that the writer who immerses himself in the life of the people will find his prose revitalized through the influence of the "folk language" of the common people: "From Chaucer, through Shakespeare to Shaw . . . it is this popular, almost proverbial language on which our greatest authors have chiefly drawn." The fact that many writers have cut themselves off from "this eternal spring of renewal" explains why much of their writings lack vitality, in contrast to, say, Kipling's, "one of the few whose prose has had real vitality." Ultimately, good prose "is largely the lost art of calling things by their right names."¹⁸⁵

But, Fox observes,

This art of prose is a dying one in our own day, for in order to call things by their right names, you must not be afraid of the things you have to describe, nor allow any barriers to arise between you and them. Cobbett's idea was one thing, the B.B.C. uses it to conceal life.¹⁸⁶

Certainly Ralph Fox does not try to conceal anything. The Novel and the People is the clearest statement of principles and methodology that had been written up to that time. As John Lehmann observes, Fox has "an intense interest in literature as literature," and "what gave his

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 124.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 137.

judgement so often convincing depth and force . . . was that he had as a critic not merely a lively intelligence and fine emotional reactions, but also a profound unifying philosophy of literature, to which his Marxism had led him."¹⁸⁷

Equally as perceptive as Ralph Fox's The Novel and the People and in some ways even more brilliant than much of Caudwell's writings is Alick West's Crisis and Criticism (1937), a work which is complex and difficult to summarize. If one major quality can be said to characterize Crisis and Criticism, it would be the author's critical rigor. The structure of the book is as follows: West argues that the two main elements of modern critical theory are (1) the abandonment of the concept of personality or character as the creative agent in literature, and (2) the rejection of Marxism as a critical methodology. West proceeds to give a short survey of literary criticism from the seventeenth century to the present, concentrating on the Romantics (especially Coleridge). He then looks at the criticism of three major critics--T. S. Eliot, Herbert Read, and I. A. Richards--and, employing all of the devices of a modern formalist analyzing one of Donne's poems, provides a devastating criticism of their work. Next, he

¹⁸⁷ John Lehmann, T. A. Jackson, C. Day Lewis, eds. Ralph Fox: A Writer in Arms (New York: International Publishers, 1937), pp. 107, 108.

constructs a critical approach of his own, combining many of the elements of Romantic criticism with Marxism. In the final section of the book, he tests his approach by applying it to an analysis of one of Shakespeare's sonnets, to a portion of Milton's Paradise Lost, and to an extensive analysis of Joyce's Ulysses.

Like Morris--West begins his book with a quote taken from one of Morris' lectures--and Marx, West is interested in relating creative activity to man's everyday experience, his praxis. However, in present critical discussions, according to West, there appears to be an abandonment of the concept of the individual as the creative agent (this is exemplified by T. S. Eliot's "Impersonal Theory of Poetry," best seen in his essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent"). In earlier times, "a poet wrote a poem in the same way as 'I' did anything else--inspiration apart." On the other hand, "the poet to-day, as seen by literary criticism, writes his poems differently. There is something in the process alien to the former sense of 'I.'"¹⁸⁸ West relates this to an epistemological crisis involving one's sense of identity:

The fact that literary criticism no longer conceives the relation of the poet to his poetry, as similar to the relationship "I" felt to "my" actions, is part of a larger change. Personality, character, self, "I" have become problematical.

¹⁸⁸ Alick West, Crisis and Criticism (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1937), p. 3.

The conflict of feeling and thought round "we" is the reason why literary criticism no longer projects the old "I" to make it the creator of poetry and literature.¹⁸⁹

As an illustration of his theory, West analyzes the first eighteen lines of Eliot's The Wasteland, where the "us" and "we" are a mysterious mixture of human, vegetable, and earthy elements. He concludes his argument saying,

This alternation between the "we" of the ordinary bourgeois world [i.e., the human characters in The Wasteland] and the discovery beneath it, with a thrill of metaphysical awe, of a deeper, elemental "we," is an experience known to many. "Our" reality, not only "my" reality, has become an enigma. These uneasy stirrings in the bourgeois social world are the power underlying the changes in critical theory. When I do not know any longer who are the "we" to whom I belong, I do not know any longer who "I" am either. "I" can no longer be projected into a poem as the source of the creative energy felt in it.¹⁹⁰

The result is that literature and the creative process come to be related to mysterious transcendental process rather than to man's praxis and his relationship to society. West believes that this theory had its origins in criticism of the Romantics; modern criticism "retains and accentuates the idealistic and religious aspects of romantic aesthetics."¹⁹¹ Moreover, far from neglecting aesthetics, it is this modern distortion of romantic aesthetics for which a Marxist approach criticizes and provides an alternative method.

¹⁸⁹ West, p. 4.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 6.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., p. 8.

West has a good deal of respect for the Romantics, especially Coleridge, and he provides a detailed analysis of Coleridge's criticism. For the purposes of this study, it is only necessary to summarize what West considers to be the major achievements of Coleridge's thinking:

- (1) A conception of the reality of the individual as social.
- (2) A rejection of the idea that language corresponds to "things" or "representations of things."
- (3) The assertion that language corresponds to thoughts and the "legitimate order and connection of words, to the laws of thinking."
- (4) The emphasis on language as activity, as action, with "words and their arrangement corresponding to those who speak, not to that which is spoken about."¹⁹²
- (5) The belief that the "criterion of value for the expression of thought through language is the measure in which the thought expresses or symbolizes the organic social reality to which language itself corresponds."¹⁹³
- (6) The conception of a dialectical relationship, the reconciliation of opposites and their merger into a "higher third as the characteristic of social order, social movements, and literature--"in literature, the same contradictory movement is active as in society and constitutes its excellence."¹⁹⁴
- (7) A hatred of capitalism.

West analyzes a section of Shelley's Defense of Poetry in which Shelley argues for the social nature of language.

¹⁹² Ibid., p. 17.

¹⁹³ Ibid., p. 18.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 21.

West observes: "This is a similar view to Coleridge's. Language corresponds to the speaker, not the thing. The expressive order of poetry has a common origin with other social activity. The essence of poetry is social relation; the conflicting principles within society 'constitute beauty in art.'"¹⁹⁵ Furthermore, Coleridge's aesthetic has revolutionary implications:

Coleridge's conception of poetry as the expression of the potential power of the body politic is inseparable from the demand that its actual power must give all its members rights of human beings; for it he did not make this demand, the labourers would be tacitly excluded from the potential power which literature expresses, and the conception of literature and potential power would be fundamentally different.

In Blake's attacks on classical character which sacrifices art to money, through all Shelley's work, in Wordsworth's theory of poetic diction, is the same spirit of revolt against capitalist tyranny, the same demand that poetry, and the theory of poetry, shall make itself the voice of the oppressed.¹⁹⁶

It is one of the major theses of West's book that modern writers and critics have betrayed the revolutionary heritage of the Romantic critics. This rejection of the Romantics begins, West says, with Matthew Arnold's "superior assertion" that the romantic poets "'did not know enough,'" and is continued by Eliot who "treats Wordsworth as a schoolboy."¹⁹⁷ In contrast to the Romantics, "Arnold made it his business to change poetry

¹⁹⁵West, loc. cit.

¹⁹⁶Ibid., p. 22.

¹⁹⁷Ibid., p. 85.

from a revolt against capitalism into its 'consolation and stay.'" In order to do this with some show of conviction, he started the isolation of the 'poetry' in poetry from its sense. He distilled its essence into single test lines (thereby stimulating a timid poetic snobbery), so that the significance of the poetry as social action should vanish completely."¹⁹⁸

In one way or another, all three of the critics that West discusses in detail--Eliot, Read, and Richards--are shown to reject aesthetics in favor of a critical theory which divorces the poet and his work from the society in which they arise and which provides the artist and the reader an escape from having to face the social implications of art and its relationship to social action. Again, since I am concerned with only a part of his thought, it is not necessary to examine in detail all of West's analysis. As representative example, I will look at the discussion he gives of I. A. Richards.

In his Practical Criticism, Richards raises the issue of "stock response," i.e., where in the reading of the poem "some word or theme wakens strong, firmly established views or emotions in the reader's mind; the projects them into the poem, which he then accepts or rejects, not for what it is, but as his own response."¹⁹⁹ One of

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 86.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 61.

the stock responses with which Richards deals comes under the heading of "sentimentality," which "shows itself as the refusal or unwillingness to be moved by a poem on the ground that to do so would be sentimental." Richards notes that in the eighteenth century, mature, adult men were not afraid to be seen weeping; however, today "many readers are afraid of free expansive emotion, even when the situation warrants it. . . . It leads them . . . to suspect and avoid situations that may awaken strong and simple feeling. It produces shallowness and trivial complexity in their response."²⁰⁰ Richards defines three meanings of sentimental: a person may be called "sentimental" if his emotions are too easily aroused; "sentimental" may mean "crude"; "a response is sentimental when, either through the overpersistence of tendencies or through the interaction of sentiments, it is inappropriate to the situation that calls it forth." Richards argues that a "sentimentalist" in the last sense "'is not distributing his interest widely enough, and is distributing it in too few forms.'"

West offers an alternative explanation as to why Richards' students were anxious not to be "sentimental." First, he examines Richards' definitions":

On the one hand, these meanings of "sentimental" may include too much: if a man starts beating his

²⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 62.

wife because she gets the better of him in a discussion, his emotions are too easily stirred, his response is crude, and inappropriate to the situation; but we should hardly call such an action "sentimental." On the other hand, none of these meanings explain satisfactorily why the accusation of sentimentality is, as Dr. Richards says, "more annoying than any slur cast upon our capacity as thinkers" . . . Hence the discussion of sentimentality does not show why emotion is inhibited so often out of fear of incurring this slur.²⁰¹

West admits that "it is a very complex problem, and any approach can only be tentative"; however, he asserts that the problem of sentimentality is a "social question, calling for the historical treatment."²⁰² He begins his analysis with a quote from the Communist Manifesto:

The bourgeoisie, wherever it has got the upper hand, has put an end to all feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations. It has pitilessly torn asunder the motley feudal ties that bound man to his "natural superiors," and has left no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest, than callous "cash-payment."²⁰³

Marx and Engels provide an insight into the problem of sentimentality; West remarks,

As suggested in the discussion of Mr. Eliot's criticism, the inhibition of emotion with which we are concerned, is part of class exploitation. The emotion which is inhibited, is not all emotion, but those feelings of social solidarity which develop out of cooperation. They have been inhibited in some degree during the whole period of class struggle, and it is an intensification of that inhibition when the bourgeoisie "left no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest"

²⁰¹ Ibid., p. 63.

²⁰² Ibid., p. 64.

²⁰³ Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, Selected Works, pp. 37-38.

and carried the inhibition of emotion to the length of Puritanism.²⁰⁴

West traces the rise and use of the term sentimental from about the middle of the eighteenth century where it is "the result of contrary tendencies to this destruction of the feelings of social solidarity."²⁰⁵ The emphasis on "sentimentality" and "sensibility" is the dialectical response to the conception of society as an aggregate of warring atoms:

The rise of the word "sentimental" seems to me to be the expression of these forces contrary to the destruction of social solidarity by the cash-nexus. . . . This historical origin of the word is the reason why for so long and to a great extent still today "sentimental" applied chiefly to feelings concerned with home, childhood, and the past, and love; and why "sentimental value" is opposed to cash value.²⁰⁶

West links the word sentimental to the term romantic, and observes how capitalist society attacked both terms; either one indicated "a weakness in character."²⁰⁷ The terms fall into disrepute when the real, united social solidarity of the working class threatens capitalism.

West also criticizes Richards' treatment of stock responses because they were made almost exclusively in terms of the individual rather than of social development. At the same time, he takes issue with Richards'

²⁰⁴West, p. 64.

²⁰⁵Ibid., p. 65.

²⁰⁶Ibid., p. 66.

²⁰⁷West, loc. cit.

assertion that poetry is "pseudo-statement," that it has no reference to any objective reality outside itself.

West rejects this idea:

We have suggested the importance in the reading of poetry of the reader's identification of himself with the poet and with humanity. Just as the conflict around social solidarity interferes with the enjoyment of poetry, so, on the other hand, the enjoyment of poetry can offer a substitute satisfaction for the impulses of social solidarity which finds no other recognized activity. And if the poetry is enjoyed without reference to what the poet is saying about objective reality and to the implications of his attitude in social action, if literature as a whole is regarded as an attitude which cannot be disproved by political ideology and must be maintained independently of it, then one has apparently escaped from the situation which inhibits emotion in actual life. For the source of that inhibition, as we saw, is the inability to make a decision in the issue before society today: the individual is aware that the class with which he feels solidarity is working for the destruction of culture; but he cannot identify himself with society through its past cultural activity without having to think or make up his mind about the practical activity of society and his own share in it now.

Thus Dr. Richards' method of escape from all the problems centering round the bourgeois "we" is to make poetry a substitute for social solidarity in action and to isolate it from the practical issues of such action.²⁰⁸

In addition, the basic assumption, "the existence of society," which Richards makes in Science and Poetry is inadequate:

Dr. Richards thus simply forgets that the basis of all emotion is the activity of society in keeping itself alive and changing the means of doing so; and that the basis of the emotions of each one of us is our share in that activity. There can be no poem, no response to a poem, without previous

²⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 77.

social activity. And that activity necessarily tests all utterances by their objective validity, because it is a matter of life and death to us whether what we say about the objective world is true or not. Our response to a poem derives from previous social activity; belief in our statements as truth and not myth, is an essential part of that activity. When Dr. Richards wishes to preserve the emotional value of poetry by isolating it from the social activity which tests the objective truth of utterances by practice; he is destroying the possibility of any response to poetry by isolating the response from its only source.²⁰⁹

West uses the example of Wordsworth and claims that "Wordsworth's poetry . . . is social action. We feel the poems which he sent to Fox in the measure we feel his emotion about the expropriated peasantry. We can only feel that [i.e., Wordsworth's emotion] through what we feel today about such things as the Means Test." By not testing poetic utterance against our own experience of reality, we are using poetry to preserve a corrupt social order; "that" says West, "is the worst kind of stock response."²¹⁰

West discovers similar problems in the criticism of T. S. Eliot, Herbert Read, and the Surrealists. He urges that the critic must return and salvage the basic principles of Romanticism which modern criticism has abandoned. West sees Romantic criticism as "a great achievement. Its conception of social relations as constituting beauty in art, of a conflict and antagonism in

²⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 78.

²¹⁰ Ibid., p. 79.

these relations and of the same conflict reconciled in art, of poetry as the voice of humanity against oppression and injustice and the duty of the poets to co-operate in ending them--all these ideas are of the highest value."²¹¹ At the same time, by combining Marxism's materialistic conception of history with Romantic doctrine, the critic can eliminate Romanticism's "idealism." The idealism, West feels is Romanticism's major defect:

As indicated earlier, the romantic poets were unable in their particular circumstances to give a material meaning to their social conceptions, Coleridge could not see the living men and women of England in their productive activity as the only reality of his "body politic" without abandoning his belief in religion. Hence in romantic criticism the social relations which constitute beauty in art are not the actual social relations, but the conception of the relations. The life of the body politic, of which the life of literature is a form, is not the actual living, but a symbol. ²¹² Literature is still the expression of the Word.

To give substance to Coleridge's "body politic," West quotes from Marx's Critique of Political Economy which asserts that the mode of production is the basis of social life:

The mode of production of the material means of existence conditions the whole process of social, political and intellectual life. . . . Just as we cannot judge an individual on the basis of his own opinion of himself, so such a revolutionary epoch cannot be judged from its own consciousness; but on the contrary this consciousness must be explained from the contradictions of material life,

²¹¹Ibid., pp. 88-89.

²¹²Ibid., p. 89.

from the existing conflict between social productive forces and productive relationships. . . . Bourgeois productive relationships are the last antagonistic form of the social process of production--antagonistic in the sense not of individual antagonism, but of an antagonism arising out of the conditions of the social life of individuals; but the productive forces developing within the womb of bourgeois society at the same time create the material conditions for the solution of this antagonism. With this social system, therefore, the pre-history of human society comes to a close.²¹³

"This," West explains, "is the reality of Coleridge's 'body politic.' It is these material and social relations which constitute beauty in art."²¹⁴

West also makes a valuable distinction between the Romantics' conception of "organism" and Marx's. For the Romantics and some modern critics, "organicism" denotes "only a selection of social relations," and these relations are seen as the "expression of the abstract principle, such as 'God' or 'national spirit' in which they are formulated." In this sense it is still the consciousness of man that determines his existence. By contrast, "organism" in Marx's use of the term comprehends "all social relations, however much they may contradict a society's current ideal of itself; and it is the totality of social relations that determines men's

²¹³In Selsam and Martel, eds. Reader in Marxist Philosophy, pp. 186-87.

²¹⁴West, p. 91.

consciousness."²¹⁵ Furthermore, the Romantics' conception of organism is a relatively static one, "in the sense that, though it is living, it does not change its character; it may be limited in time by a mysterious birth and death, as in Spengler's conception, but during its whole life it has a unity like that of a personality. Human history here becomes an inexplicable succession of group personalities."²¹⁶ By contrast, the social organism from Marx's point of view changes its character through class conflict. West adds,

The idealistic conception of the organism abhors the thought of class-war, for it only condemns the war waged by the workers; and its conception of a higher unity than that of class is propaganda for the capitalists. Consistently with his belief in the mind of England Mr. Eliot declares himself to be a royalist in politics.²¹⁷

West declares that the idealism of the Romantics must be changed in order that literature may be related to "the changing social organism in reality, not to the conception of certain selected social relations."²¹⁸ The remainder of Crisis and Criticism is devoted to this task.

In a chapter entitled "Continuation of Romanticism," West cites several recent studies in aesthetics, biology,

²¹⁵ Ibid., p. 92.

²¹⁶ West, loc. cit.

²¹⁷ West, p. 92.

²¹⁸ West, loc. cit.

and sociology to demonstrate that "art in general, the sense of beauty, and the genius of the artist, which romanticism had been inclined to leave as general abstractions, are now related to a material, social basis."²¹⁹

His most important contribution to Marxist aesthetics, however, is his discussion of the nature, function, and value of language. Employing the studies of Ludwig Noire, Sir R. Paget, G. A. de Laguna, the Russian philologist N. Marr, Karl Bucher, and Pearsall Smith, West observes that "the conception of language as being originally a means for the expression of thought, and as having developed out of intellectual process" is being abandoned for the theory that language is primarily an instrument for action.²²⁰

In addition, another principle of language is being re-examined; here the stress is on language "not as a means of communication in response to the individual's need to put himself in touch with the consciousness of another individual, but for the organization of society as a whole" (i.e., Dewey's observation that society continues to exist in and through the communication of significant symbols). It is the realization that language functions as a means of social control, that language functions "in relation to the organization of the group, and not only

²¹⁹ Ibid., p. 93.

²²⁰ Ibid., p. 97.

in relation to the activity of the group with the organization taken for granted."²²¹ West argues with Marr: "language is social existence become articulate," and it is directly related to work, "for it was in the process of work that this power to express social existence of the group was most valuable."²²²

A further development of this discussion of language centers around the function of idiom. Like Ralph Fox, West believes that "all good literature has richness and vigour of style, and one source of this is to a certain extent traceable--the use of idiomatic expression. The more a style uses words and expressions in their strict intellectual sense, to denote definable concepts, the more it approaches science; the more it uses them idiomatically, in violation of the laws of grammar and logic, the more it approaches literature as art."²²³ Furthermore, the function of idiom is to promote social activity. West quotes from Pearsall Smith's Words and Idioms:

[Idiom's] main object is not self-expression, but exhortation or reproof; the person or persons spoken to are more important than the speaker; what they are to do, or cease doing, how they are to act, for what kinds of behavior they are to be reprov'd, are the main subjects which concern it; and its phrases, stuck out in the practical emergencies of some

²²¹Ibid., pp. 98-99.

²²²Ibid., p. 99.

²²³Ibid., p. 105.

pursuit, when success or failure were hanging perhaps in the balance, are vivid with the communicable emotions of incitement and reprobation and abuse.²²⁴

West's argument is clear; idiom and ordinary speech are united in literature into a seamless web. The value of literature, then, "derives from the fact that it arouses in us a bodily tension associated with our general relations with other people and our common activity with them, and that the general character of this tension is the effort required to keep a socially organized group going, in spite of inertia and opposition."²²⁵ Literature is directly related to man's praxis.

West concludes his argument by acknowledging that his theory of interpretation is based on "Marx's development of romanticism." The object of his study is to give "material meaning to the ideas of Shelley and Coleridge that a poem and a society are organic in the same way, that relations in society constitute beauty in art." His criterion of value is clearly stated:

The relation of literature as art, distinguishable from other literary matter, to the social and economic development that determines all literary production, good, bad, and indifferent, is through the fact that the economic basis is not an automatic machine, but living men and women, whose energy has to be organized. Good literature contributes to that organization and to the changing of it; bad literature consumes its products, and

²²⁴ Ibid., pp. 108-09.

²²⁵ Ibid., p. 134.

debases them. . . . The social organism to which literature has to be related, is humanity in its advance to socialism. The function of criticism is to judge literature, both content and form, as a part of this movement. It can only fulfill this function if it takes part in this movement itself on the side of the workers of the world. It is in this sense that its aesthetics are not static, but dynamic.²²⁶

Crisis and Criticism ends with West's detailed analysis of Joyce's Ulysses, in which he attempts to apply his theory to this extraordinary novel. Again, it is not necessary to go into detail; however, one of his final comments on the book is interesting and it is a representative of West's particular approach:

Joyce is an extraordinary illustration of the penetration of Hegel's remarks about the last phase of romantic art, and Marx's acute observation of his boredom. Content means nothing to Joyce because he has nothing to do. He is attached to a social order which is itself doomed, and through that attachment he is unable to decide for any particular activity. Hence the only way in which he can satisfy his growing need of social identification, is to sink himself in the feeling of words, in words as the result of the previous activity of the social organism, in their sound and in the sum of all their possible meanings, echoes and puns. But words as sense, not as the result of activity in the past, but as instruments for organising activity now, mean nothing to him. For he has nothing to do with them. Joyce does not construct a private language; he plays with the social language in order to sleep secure in the feeling of the past, and safe from the sense of the present. Works in Progress--where to?²²⁷

This is not to say that West thinks Ulysses is a bad novel--far from it; he praises it for a number of qualities, especially for its "marvelous language." Ultimately,

²²⁶ Ibid., pp. 134, 140.

²²⁷ Ibid., p. 175.

however, his view is similar to Ralph Fox's: "The social activity embodied in the content, to which the social energy awakened in us by the form of expression is directed, is partly destruction, partly exploitation of forms of intellectual and emotional life, created by society, at a lower level of activity than that which created them. Consequently, the book does not organize social energy; it irritates it, because it gives it no aim it can work for."²²⁸

Whether one agrees with West's criticism or not, he does raise some important critical issues, and his comments on Joyce are, I think, cogent and provocative. Perhaps West's contribution to literary criticism is best summed up by Stanley Edgar Hyman who says that Crisis and Criticism "includes probably the most sensitive detailed readings of texts in Marxist criticism." He further remarks,

The book exposes the critical limitations of men like Eliot, Richards, and Read with neatness and dispatch and concludes, like Caudwell, affirming the relationship of literature to production as its essential formal determinant. To illustrate his prescription for criticism, West makes brilliant incidental readings of The Wasteland, a Shakespeare sonnet, and Paradise Lost and concludes with an appendix constituting the toughest test of his method possible, a long and absolutely first-rate analysis of Joyce's Ulysses.²²⁹

²²⁸ Ibid., p. 180.

²²⁹ Stanley Edgar Hyman, The Armed Vision, p. 193; emphasis added.

My reasons for examining in detail the works of R. D. Charques, Philip Henderson, Ralph Fox, and Alick West are, in many ways, implicit in Hyman's praise of West. Writing from a Marxist perspective, these critics made valuable contributions to English literary criticism.²³⁰ Another reason is to demonstrate the continuing importance of William Morris; all four of the critics discussed openly acknowledge his influence. Finally, it seemed to me necessary to provide some background and transition from Morris to Christopher Caudwell, in many ways the most brilliant Marxist critics. Many of the issues which occupy Charques, Henderson, Fox, and West are taken up by Caudwell. Many of the problems they encounter in trying to analyze literature from the point of view of Marxism are the same problems which Caudwell is forced to confront. The atmosphere in which they wrote, the political situation and their own sense of crisis, is essentially the same environment in which Caudwell writes. Many of their mistakes, their errors in judgment, and their often irritating polemics which tend to obscure rather than clarify the issue, are the same mistakes to which Caudwell is prone.

²³⁰ There were literally hundreds of studies which could be categorized as essentially Marxist in their approach; see, for example, the bibliographies in Lee Baxandall, Marxism and Aesthetics, pp. 55-85.

CHAPTER V

CHRISTOPHER CAUDWELL AND THE SOCIAL FUNCTION OF LITERATURE

In The Armed Vision (1948), Stanley Edgar Hyman notes how "ironic it is that since the publication of The Communist Manifesto, "the foremost work of Marxist literary criticism, if not the only large-scale work, should have been written by a young Englishman of twenty-eight, who had become a Marxist the year before, and was dead the following year."¹ Indeed, the situation may be more ironic than Hyman himself realizes. Hyman is referring to Caudwell's Illusion and Reality (1937), and he is the first critic to give it the critical examination that it deserves. He notes that despite the reliance of almost every contemporary British Marxist critic on Illusion and Reality, Caudwell's work is almost totally unknown among non-Marxist critics. He concludes this observation with the statement, "If Caudwell is finally to receive belated recognition as the most genuine important Marxist cultural thinker of our time, it is essential that his work be available, even that part of

¹ Stanley Edgar Hyman, The Armed Vision, p. 168.

it which antedates his conversion to Marxism. If, on the other hand, he is to remain the cult of the relative few who have so far discovered him, even a cult needs more ikons than currently circulate."² The interesting irony here is that when Hyman issued The Armed Vision in paperback he omitted the chapter on Caudwell (as well as the one on Edmund Wilson) which, in a conversation with this writer, he justified by declaring Marxism "old hat."

In his chapter on Caudwell, Hyman briefly mentions Caudwell's Studies in a Dying Culture (1938) which contains eight essays, four on contemporary figures-- George Bernard Shaw, D. H. Lawrence, T. E. Lawrence, and H. G. Wells--and four on intellectual problems: Pacifism, Love, Freud and psychoanalysis, and Liberty. Hyman notes that Caudwell is opposed to Rousseau's belief that man is born free but now is confined by the "chains" of society; Caudwell's opposition to this Romantic concept is a central theme in all of his writings. Hyman remarks, "To it [Rousseau's statement] he opposes the rigor of the Marxist view of freedom in society rather than from society, of man born in chains but attaining freedom. Essentially it is Engels's 'Freedom is the recognition of necessity' opposed to Rousseau's freedom as the ignorance of necessity, and the Engels line runs like a red thread

²Ibid., p. 173.

through the book as well as through all of Caudwell's work."³ After citing some of the book's obvious flaws, Hyman observes, "Nevertheless, the level of insight is generally very high, the irony is mordant, a number of the special treatments are first-rate analyses in the social conditioning of ideas . . . and the criticism of psychoanalysis in particular, from the point of view of neurology as well as materialism, is brilliantly penetrating."⁴ Although the praise is well-deserved, Hyman might have given the work more attention if he could have seen Caudwell's development of some of these same topics. Unfortunately, Further Studies in a Dying Culture which contains five more important essays--"The Breath of Discontent: A Study in Bourgeois Aesthetics," "Men and Nature: A Study in Bourgeois History," "Consciousness: A Study in Bourgeois Psychology," and "Reality: A Study in Bourgeois Philosophy"--did not appear until 1949, the same year as Hyman's book. The essays on aesthetics, history, and psychology should be enough to assure Caudwell of a prominent place in any intellectual history of the development of Marxist thought.

Hyman documents Caudwell's influence on other Marxists, particularly on George Thompson, whose Aeschylus and Athens (1941) is heavily indebted to Caudwell, and on

³Ibid., p. 170.

⁴Hyman, loc. cit.

the writers who have contributed to the British Marxist journal Modern Quarterly. It is in this publication that Caudwell's contribution has been most hotly debated.⁵ For the most part these discussions have confined themselves to judging Caudwell's "orthodoxy" and have contributed little to an understanding of his work. These debates have been documented, and it is not necessary to review them in this study.⁶ Hynes' summation seems to me the correct one:

Caudwell's reputation as a critic remains insecure. To many Marxists he is an example of "uncorrectness," a clever young man tainted by bourgeois notions. Non-Marxists tend to regard him as a representative of "Marxist criticism," a system that to them is by definition restrictive and distorting. In either case, praise is grudging and qualified. Caudwell will get his due when he is seen as what he is--a gifted synthesizer who derived his world-view from Marx, but who was in practice heterodox and individual.⁷

Indeed, as this study has attempted to show, there are many "Marxisms," and the degree to which Caudwell

⁵Cf. Maurice Cornforth, "Caudwell and Marxism," MQ, 6, No. 1 (Winter 1950-51), 16-33; George Thomson, "In Defense of Poetry," MQ, 6, No. 2 (Spring 1951), 707-34; "The Caudwell Discussion," contributions by Alan Bush, Montagu Slater, Alick West, G. M. Matthews, Jack Beeching, Peter Cronin, MQ, 6, No. 3 (Summer 1951), 259-75; "The Caudwell Discussion," contributions by Margot Heinemann, Edward York, Werner Thierry, G. Robb, J. D. Bernal, Edwin S. Smith, Maurice Cornforth, MQ, 6, No. 4 (Autumn 1951), 340-58.

⁶Cf. David N. Margolies, The Function of Literature: A Study of Christopher Caudwell's Aesthetics (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1969), pp. 18-19.

⁷Samuel Hynes, "Introduction," to Christopher Caudwell's Romance and Realism, p. 23.

conforms to Marxism (even if one sees Marxism as an inflexible and absolute body of precepts, which, I believe, is inaccurate) depends on one's perspective. Certainly there is no question as to Caudwell's remarkable achievement in synthesizing diverse and seemingly unrelated fields. The bibliography for Illusion and Reality alone runs to three hundred and fifty titles. "It is," as Hyman remarks, "one of the most remarkable bibliographies of recent times and, unlike many, seems to represent only books utilized directly or indirectly in the text"; it is "almost a catalogue of the best twentieth-century thought."⁸

Like Margolies, Hyman agrees that Caudwell's most "fruitful" contribution rests on his "study of the social relations of literary forms," and he singles out for special praise Caudwell's six-page diagram of "The Movement of Bourgeois Poetry," where in one column Caudwell provides a Marxian analysis of a particular historical stage, in another column the overall features of the corresponding literature, and in a third column the particular formal characteristics of that literature. While criticizing Caudwell for being "somewhat overschematic," he says that his "society-style correlations come through as more than persuasive."⁹ Hyman observes,

⁸Hyman, The Armed Vision, p. 174.

⁹Hyman, loc. cit.

He [Caudwell] knows, for example, as Eliot does not, why the great poetic drama died with Webster and Tourner and is not revivable as a living art form in our day: that it was a collective form depending on a collective feudal institution, the court, and died with it (just as Shakespeare could not write plays at Stratford, apart from it).¹⁰

He also praises Caudwell's conception of a "poetic pocket," an area out of the main stream of social development, "like Hardy's 'country' and Housman's Cambridge." In other words, Caudwell recognizes that the "general picture of the poetic situation at any given time does not cover all the cases." Hyman believes that Caudwell "is best at correcting the oversimplifications and reductions of non-Marxist thinkers, noting that the Oedipus complex explains everything about Hamlet but its greatness, or that Frazer's god-king acts as though he had worked out the idea of god-kings for himself in the act of seizing power."¹¹

At the same time, when Hyman puts Caudwell in his historical context and discusses the problems of Marxist criticism in general, he is often guilty of the same oversimplifications and reductions as other non-Marxist critics. His explanation of Marx and Engels' theories is almost a caricature; he argues that the problems of Marxist literary theory are implicit in Marxist theory:

¹⁰Hyman, loc. cit.

¹¹Ibid., p. 201.

the rosy nineteenth century teleological evolutionism of Hegel, whereby the world would get progressively better and better, art dropping off somewhere along the line with other imperfect human expressions; the concentration on what men have in common at any given time, tending to slight their differences, which are the seeds of art; the constant confusion between interpreting the world and changing it, between the inevitability of socialism and the necessity of bringing it on by revolutionary action, between understanding the class nature of literature and making writers enlist in your class or party.¹²

He says that some of these ideas are "implicit in Marx and Engels," but admits that "many of them come in with Lenin." He then observes that it is not the Marxism but the "personal deficiencies of most of the Marxist critics: ignorance, a hatred of literature, and no imagination."¹³ However, in his discussion of American, British, and Continental Marxist criticism, he demonstrates that the charge has little meaning.¹⁴

In contrasting Freudianism and Marxism as methods of literary analysis, Hyman does make some important distinctions and clearly sees the limits of both methods:

Like Freud and psychoanalysis, Marx and Marxism can be of tremendous use to criticism if the critic

¹²Ibid., p. 201.

¹³Hyman, loc. cit.

¹⁴As it turned out, Hyman was interested enough in what was "implicit" in Marx and Engels to examine their works in detail; the result was The Tangled Bank, a brilliant and imaginative work, whose section on Marx and Engels does not collaborate Hyman's initial observations.

has a clear delimitation of what the method can and cannot do. Psychoanalysis, Freud admitted, can deal with the personal origins and psycho-symbolic interrelations of the work, but not with formal artistic techniques and its aesthetic value. Similarly, Marxism can deal with the social origins and socio-symbolic interrelations of the work, but it can, in addition, deal with its formal artistic techniques to some extent in social and historic terms, and in the same terms it can make rather limited statements of aesthetic value. What it cannot do is use its social analysis as a technique for debunking, erect reflection-of-reality as the major criterion of aesthetic value, or dismiss the author, his psyche, and his personal artistry as factors less important than social and historical factors. It is within these strict limits that the critics who have made the most effective use of Marxism in moderation--Burke, Empson, even Edmund Wilson to some extent . . . Matthiessen, Knights, and others--have operated. The best Marxist critics, from Plekhanov to Christopher Caudwell, have recognized similar limits.¹⁵

Hyman admits that he is unfamiliar with Lukács' work, and one wonders whether or not "these strict limits" have any applicability to a critic of Lukács' scope.

In discussing Illusion and Reality, Hyman observes that "the great fault of the book, in fact, is that it talks about specific poems too little."¹⁶ This has been a continuing criticism of Caudwell's work. Reviewing Romance and Realism, one critic says of Caudwell,

There is no evidence that he was a highly intelligent reader or that he responded to the imaginative life of a work of art. Everything in his mind is general, abstract, official, he has no response to the detail of a poem or novel. The proof is that

¹⁵Hyman, p. 203.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 176.

he never feels bound to quote anything from the author under consideration. Caudwell claims an interest in form, technique and social change, but his sense of these complex matters is so blunt that it cannot risk the test of detail.¹⁷

This criticism, it seems to me, misses the point. For one thing, Caudwell does supply detail; the difference is that his detail is one of logical development rather than of specific quotes. For another thing, this criticism ignores the fact that Caudwell is developing a theory of literature rather than engaging in practical criticism. In a sense the charge that Caudwell does not supply specific quotes is analogous to attacking a theoretical physicist for being too theoretical. Caudwell is a cultural critic; he is interested in large cultural patterns. When he does examine a specific author, he is attempting to discover what aspects of the culture the author manifests in his work. As Margolies argues, "In a critical essay on an author we are accustomed to expect a somewhat detailed criticism of the works of that author, not, as we often find in Caudwell, a criticism of the author's society, whose symptoms the author or his work may exemplify. The criticism of Caudwell's failure to discuss the specific works is certainly justified, but sometimes it may be based on a misunderstanding of what Caudwell

¹⁷"If It's Bourgeois, It's Bad," review of Christopher Caudwell, Romance and Realism, ed. Samuel Hynes, in TLS (28 April 1972), 470.

is doing."¹⁸ J. B. S. Haldane, one of the most eminent British scientists, called Caudwell's work "a quarry of ideas," and works that furnish the reader with stimulating, original and valuable ideas that he himself may test in his own critical practice are as valuable as any criticism that supports its argument with a vast array of quotations. Caudwell is a theoretical critic, like I. A. Richards. For the most part, his criticism is an illustration of a method.

Samuel Hynes' "Introduction" to Caudwell's Romance and Realism suffers from the shortcomings of most introductions; one can only do so much in twenty-eight pages. However, he makes two comments which seem to me questionable. First, he maintains that "when Caudwell began to write Illusion and Reality, he had no English Marxist tradition on which to build; he was starting out alone--his isolation in Cornwall was an appropriate gesture--to construct his own theory."¹⁹ This claim seems to me untenable. Although he did not attend a university and was not a member of any intellectual coterie, as a member of the Party he would have had to have been familiar with some of the work and ideas of the Party's intellectuals (e.g., Ralph Fox, whose Lenin he cites in Illusion and Reality). Even if he were unfamiliar with the work of

¹⁸Margolies, p. 17.

¹⁹Hynes, p. 16.

Charques and Henderson, which is unlikely, one would suppose that since he wrote about Auden, Day Lewis and Spender, that he paid particular attention to their views concerning the relationship between the writer, his work, and revolutionary politics; he is familiar with Spender's Marxist-aesthetic criticism which was published as The Destructive Element (1934) (he mentions it on page 101 of Romance and Realism). Further, one would imagine that in selling The Daily Worker, Caudwell would have been aware of the Marxist criticism which it contained (e.g., that of T. A. Jackson, John Lehmann, Hugh MacDiarmid, Sean O'Casey, Ben Short, Stephen Spender, and Alick West), assuming that he read none of the other radical journals and magazines of the time, again an unlikely assumption.

More importantly, Caudwell has been influenced by at least one important figure in the Marxist tradition-- William Morris. The bibliography of Illusion and Reality lists Morris' lectures contained in Hopes and Fears of Art, twelve of which were written after 1883, the year in which Morris openly declared his Marxism. Moreover, Caudwell makes a special point of recognizing Morris' politics, saying that Morris' involvement with Rosetti in the "art for art's sake" movement happened "before he [Morris] became a socialist."²⁰ Although Marxist criticism has come

²⁰ Christopher Caudwell, Illusion and Reality: A Study of the Sources of Poetry (1937 rpt. New York: International Publishers, 1967), p. 109.

some distance in forty years, there is still an echo of Morris in Caudwell's works. For example, in discussing the general relationship between work and art, Caudwell writes,

Art cannot in essence be different from other cooperative social processes. A man, out of the materials of reality and his own experience, makes a product not for himself but for others. This may be an art-work or a hat. . . . It may or may not be that the creation of an art-work is "higher" than the creation of a house, and the enjoyment of an art-work "higher" than the enjoyment of warmth and protection from the elements. That will depend on what scale of values one has at the time. To a starving man no Raphael has a higher value than bread. . . . To build the house, the architect or builder uses a technique evolved by other men, a long chain of culture stretching back to pre-history. To live in it, the householder draws on a long evolution of manners, of politeness, of family life, of games and household occupations, of entertainments and conventions. The same social evolution is the basis of the artist's and reader's technique. . . . Thus the artistic process is an economic process in the same way as the building, hat-making, or food-growing process. It is secreted in the skin of society. If this seems to vulgarize and cheapen the artistic process, this is because the building and hat-making process has been vulgarized and cheapened, and is now in turn vulgarizing and cheapening art. How this is done is the story of the development of bourgeois social relations.²¹

Moreover, Caudwell shares Marx's and Morris' vision of an aesthetic utopia, which can only be achieved through social revolution. In his essay on "Beauty," Caudwell concludes by remarking,

In a society which is based on co-operation, not on compulsion, and which is conscious, not ignorant,

²¹Caudwell, Romance and Realism, pp. 37-38.

of necessity, desires as well as cognitions can be socially manipulated as part of the social process. Beauty will then return again, to enter consciously into every part of the social process. It is not a dream that labour will no longer be ugly and the products once again beautiful.²²

Obviously, Caudwell does not have Morris' almost transcendental notion of beauty, nor does he see the relationship between art and labor in exactly the same way that Morris does; he is, however, writing with Morris' work in mind. The problem is not that Caudwell is unfamiliar with Marxist aesthetics; the real problem is that he is not familiar enough with the good "bourgeois" criticism in his own time.

Hynes makes two other observations which miss the main thrust of Caudwell's criticism. In discussing Caudwell's epigraph to Illusion and Reality--"Freedom is the recognition of necessity"--Hynes remarks that as Caudwell uses this conception in examining the "relationship between man and literature, it makes literature an individual, liberating force, a mode of knowledge rather than of action, to be understood in terms of consciousness rather than of social existence."²³ At another point,

²² Christopher Caudwell, Further Studies in a Dying Culture in Christopher Caudwell, Studies and Further Studies in a Dying Culture, Two volumes in one (New York: Dodd Mead & Co., 1938, 1949), II, p. 114. Hereafter cited as Studies and Further Studies.

²³ Hynes, p. 17.

after noting Caudwell's analysis of the relationship between poetry, illusion, dream and phantasy, Hynes observes, "The effect is to separate poetry from direct contact with the objective world of action and to relate it to personal, subjective experience, 'the inner world of feelings.' There is little here about art's role in changing the world, . . . Caudwell did not see the revolutionary function of art as crucial, and many of his most direct statements about the relation of art to the individual seem ambiguous on the point of action."²⁴ If Hynes' observations are correct, then it would be difficult to see how Caudwell could be considered a Marxist; Hynes, however, fails to take into account all of Caudwell's criticism. While it is true that Caudwell often discusses art as a guide to action (i.e., its function) rather than emphasizing the creative act itself, he never implies that its effects are merely individual or that it is a "mode of knowledge rather than action." To do so would negate his whole concept of the dialectical nature of reality. One cannot, except in the abstract, separate the individual from society. Indeed, what distinguishes the individual from the genotype (the natural biological equipment that man inherits, the entire complex of instincts that he is born with, unmodified by society) is his social adaptation. Moreover,

²⁴Ibid., p. 18.

from Caudwell's perspective (and Marx's), it is impossible to separate knowledge from action. As Caudwell argues, "New consciousness (new knowledge, theory, or hypothesis) can only come into being as a result of an action, an experiment, a contact with reality which negates existing consciousness and as the result of this tension produces new consciousness--a new theory, hypothesis, or system of knowledge."²⁵ Consciousness arises in change as a result of man's praxis. Finally, while it is true that Caudwell does not see the immediate function of literature as initiating a social revolution--he is too pragmatic to believe in this²⁶--he does not "separate poetry from direct contact with the objective world of action." Although this aspect of Caudwell's thought will be developed in more detail, it should be enough to note that Caudwell defines art as the emotional ordering of social reality toward a desired goal. Art orders the emotions (or "affects" as Caudwell would say), and, in doing so, makes action possible. Moreover, emotions arise out of action, with contact with new situations (i.e., the instinct modified by the situation). "Emotion," Caudwell argues, "in all its vivid colouring, is the creation of

²⁵Further Studies, p. 146.

²⁶Cf. Margolies' chapter, "The Immediate and Future Functions of Literature," pp. 101-25.

ages of culture acting on the blind, unfeeling instincts."²⁷

David Margolies' study, The Functions of Literature: A Study of Christopher Caudwell's Aesthetics (1969), is by far the most significant work that has been done on Caudwell; he clearly establishes Caudwell's importance in developing a theory of the social function, that is to say, "a view of literature as functional for the whole society, not merely for the separate individuals who compose that society. (Social function is distinct from the sum of the effects for individuals--it is function for the whole society or class.)"²⁸ Indeed, my own study of Caudwell's theory of function can be little more than a gloss on Margolies' analysis. However, in providing a background and a historical perspective on Caudwell's writings and in demonstrating how some of Caudwell's insights are demonstrated in his critical practice, in specific comments on literary problems, Margolies is less successful. It is not correct, for example, to say that Caudwell "is the only critic" to have developed a theory of social function. I have demonstrated that Charques, Henderson, Fox, and especially West were all concerned with the social function of literature. West, particularly in his study of language as a mode of action and as a means of social control, makes a significant contribution

²⁷ Studies, p. 183.

²⁸ Margolies, p. 11.

to this theory. Furthermore, in discussing the relationship between Plekhanov and Caudwell, Margolies makes an error of historical fact. In contrasting Caudwell's theory of function with that of Plekhanov's, Margolies observes that Caudwell's early formulations of the problem are "quite close to Plekhanov's presentation of function in his writings on art and literature." However, he adds, "It is most unlikely that Caudwell was familiar with Plekhanov's views on art even though he knew some of Plekhanov's other writings on Marxist theory (Caudwell does not mention Plekhanov's critical works in his very full bibliography in Illusion and Reality and a collection of his essays, Art and Social Life, did not appear in England until well after Caudwell's death)."²⁹ Without taking anything away from Caudwell--there is no way to prove that he had read Plekhanov's views on aesthetics--many of Plekhanov's essays were available in Britain in English translation before 1937. Plekhanov's "Materialism and Art" appeared in the Modern Quarterly in the spring of 1924, and the whole of "Art and Social Life" appeared in International Literature in 1931.³⁰

I myself do not think that Plekhanov exercises a major influence on Caudwell. It is much more likely that the sources for Caudwell's development of a

²⁹ Ibid., p. 28.

³⁰ Cf. Baxendall, p. 143.

functionalist view of art lie not in his reading of other aestheticians but in his reading of sociology, linguistics, and anthropology. The bibliography of Illusion and Reality lists among others: Morgan, Frazer, Malinowski, Van Gennep, Levy-Bruhl, Kroeber, Sapir, Jespersen, Durkheim, and Tawney. Certainly, Durkheim, the sociologist, and Malinowski, the cultural anthropologist, can be thought of as two of the founders of functionalist theory, i.e., the concept that the explanation of every culture item is to be found in what it does for the whole and, correlatively, in terms of its interdependence with the other items which form the whole. This includes language; as Malinowski says in his Coral Gardens and Their Magic: ". . . words in their primary and essential sense do, act, produce and achieve."³¹

Moreover, I believe that it is in his reading of the sociologists and anthropologists that Caudwell is able to distinguish between what Margolies calls the direct function and the indirect function. Plekhanov, for the most part, sees art in terms of its "direct function," which "would include educational art such as the hunting dances of some primitive peoples which involve detailed study of the characteristics of different animals" as

³¹ Bronislaw Malinowski, Coral Gardens and Their Magic: A Study of the Methods of Tilling the Soil and of Agriculture Rites in the Trobriand Island (London: Allen and Unwin, 1935), II, 52.

well as propaganda. Caudwell, however, is able to conceive of art in its indirect function; this "indirect function" of art "would include art that fosters and appeals to a communal spirit and molds the individual's instincts to socially accepted patterns, such as religious-type dances among primitive peoples or tragedy, with its catharsis, among the Greeks."³² At the same time, his reliance on the anthropologists and sociologists accounts perhaps for his difficulty in distinguishing art from magic (Malinowski has the same difficulty).

Caudwell's Literary Studies

Caudwell has been accused of not being "a critic at all," of "ignoring the role of the imagination in the creation of a work of art," of being one whose work is "entirely lacking in charm, especially the charm of free intelligence."³³ The charges are ridiculous; Caudwell was one of the most perceptive critics of his time. However, the charge that he was not a critic is in one sense true; in a biographical note to Caudwell's Poems, Paul Beard says, "It was as a poet that he regarded himself, and continued to regard himself."³⁴ Certainly he is not

³²Margolies, p. 30.

³³"If It's Bourgeois, It's Bad," p. 470.

³⁴Paul Beard, "Biographical Note," to Christopher Caudwell, Poems (London: John Lane, 1939), p. 9.

a textual critic. Practically all of his criticism is aimed at demonstrating a method--a Marxian method--and seeing literature from a Marxist perspective. Moreover, especially when Caudwell is attempting to see the writer and his work in relation to large patterns, there is always the problem of oversimplification, and Caudwell often cannot see the trees for the forest. On the other hand, at his best, Caudwell's criticism is insightful and, at times, strikingly original. His criticism is indeed a "quarry of ideas." Taken as a whole, it demonstrates what a sensitive critic using a Marxist perspective can do to illuminate the role of the artist in society, the genesis of the creative act, and the social function of art.

In order to keep this investigation within reasonable limits, I am going to confine my analysis of Caudwell's specific literary studies to his essay on D. H. Lawrence and to Caudwell's study of contemporary novelists in Romance and Realism. These pieces are representative and they illustrate many of the weaknesses as well as the strengths in Caudwell's approach.

Caudwell's essay, "D. H. Lawrence: A Study of the Bourgeois Artist," attempts to articulate Lawrence's world-view, to place it in its cultural perspective, to understand the sources of Lawrence's vision, and, to criticize this view in light of contemporary conditions.

The essay is a classic example of the traditional Marxist approach to literature. Caudwell treats Lawrence as an "ideal type," as a representative of the bourgeois artist who feels compelled to abandon "pure art" for social prophecy. As Caudwell announces in the first paragraph of the essay, his primary goal is to answer the question, "What is the function of the artist? Any artist such as Lawrence who aims to be 'more than' an artist, necessarily raises this question."³⁵

One of the first things that one notices about all of Caudwell's work is that he begins with basic principles. In establishing the basis for his criticism, he assumes very little; in practically all of his essays, he carefully establishes his theoretical perspective and methodological approach. Thus he begins his essay by defining the ontological status of art:

Art is a social function. This is not a Marxist demand, but arises from the very way in which art forms are defined. Only those things are recognized as art forms which have a conscious social function. The phantasies of a dreamer are not art. They only become art when they are given music, forms or words, when they are clothed in socially recognized symbols, and of course in the process there is a modification. The phantasies are modified by the social dress; the language as a whole acquires new associations and context.³⁶

Given this definition of art, the important question then

³⁵ Caudwell, Studies, p. 44.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 44.

becomes, "What social function is art playing? For Caudwell, this question, in turn, "depends on the type of society in which it is secreted."³⁷ (The word secreted points to one of Caudwell's major weaknesses: the tendency to depend on scientific terms drawn from biology, psychology, and physics. The mish-mash of jargon which results often obscures the very problem that Caudwell is trying to clarify.)

Caudwell proceeds with a Marxian analysis of bourgeois society and the position of the artist within it. The artist "is asked to regard the art work as a finished commodity and the process of art as a relation between himself and the work, which then disappears into the market."³⁸ The consequences of this demand leave the artist with two alternatives: (1) The fact that he must sell his work on the open market may lead him to estimate the value of his work by its cash return; this produces the "best-seller," the "true romance," etc. and leads to the commercialization and vulgarization of art and its mass audience. (2) Reacting against this tendency to judge art by its cash value, the artist may revolt, affirming the value of art for art's sake:

He attempts to forget the market completely and concentrate on his relation to the art work, which now becomes still further hypostatized as an entity-in-itself. Because the art work is now completely an

³⁷ Ibid., p. 45.

³⁸ Caudwell, loc. cit.

end-in-itself, and even the market is forgotten. the art process becomes an extremely individualistic relation. The social values inherent in the art form such as syntax, tradition, rules, technique, form, accepted tonal scale, now seem to have little value, for the art work more and more exists for the individual alone.³⁹

As the artist retreats into himself and begins to think of his work as an entity unto itself, he denies art's social function, the basis of its existence. From Caudwell's point of view, this leads to art which is "more and more formless." This contradiction proceeds from Caudwell's observation that "the art work is necessarily always the product of a tension between old and conscious social formulations--the art 'form'--and new individual experience made conscious--the art 'content' or the artist's 'message.'"⁴⁰ The synthesis of 'form' and 'content' constitutes the creative act. However, as the artist begins to think of the art process not as a relation between artist and audience but as a relation between himself and his autonomous creation, the conscious social formulations (i.e., traditional forms) are increasingly disregarded as individual experience becomes dominant. The result is Dadaism and surrealism, which in turn "necessarily leads to a dissolution of those social values which make art in question a social relation, and therefore ultimately results in the art work's ceasing to be an art work and

³⁹ Ibid., p. 46.

⁴⁰ Caudwell, loc. cit.

becoming a mere private phantasy."⁴¹

This dissolution of conscious social forms has its most extreme expression in modern poetry. The only literary art form that remains to assist the bourgeois artist in becoming conscious of social relations is the novel. Caudwell refers the reader to his earlier work in which he makes the distinction between the two genres, and in order to appreciate his criticism of Lawrence, it is necessary to make the distinction clear. Through the physiological effects of its rhythm and its forcing the reader to concentrate on the words themselves, poetry forces the reader into a self-consciousness, "a physiological introversion, which is a turning-away not from the immediate environment of the reader but from the environment (or external reality) depicted in the poem." In poetry, then, "the world of external reality recedes, and the world of instinct, the affective emotional linkage behind the words, rises to the view and becomes the world of reality." The process in the novel is different:

In the novel too the subjective elements are valued for themselves and rise to view, but in a different way. The novel blots out external reality by substituting a more or less consistent mock reality which has sufficient "stuff" to stand between reader and reality. This means that in the novel the emotional associations attach not to the words but to the moving current of mock reality symbolized by the words. That is why rhythm, "preciousness," and style are alien to the novel; why the novel translates so well; why novels are not composed of words.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 47.

They are composed of scenes, actions, stuff, people, just as plays are. . . . Because words are few they are what Freud called "over-determined." One word has many affective associations because it has many "meanings" . . . In novel writing the words are arranged so that all other pieces of reality are excluded except the piece required, and the emotional association is to the resulting structure. Poetic writing is concerned with making the emotional associations either to exclude or reinforce each other, without a prior reference to a coherent piece of reality.⁴²

Of course Caudwell realizes that there are novels which contain poetry (e.g., he lists Proust, Malraux, Lawrence, and Melville); however, he claims that this does not negate the general distinction, and it is "this difference between the technique of poetry and the novel which determines the differences between the two arts."⁴³

In the novel, social relations are "overt," and in writing it the novelist becomes conscious of these social relations. In bourgeois culture, however, even the novel--in the hands of writers like Proust, Joyce, Woolf, etc.--"begins to disappear as an objective study of social relations and becomes a study of the subject's experience of society."⁴⁴ It is at this historical juncture that the revolt against art for art's sake begins among the writers themselves. Some writers continue to push the contradiction to its extreme--e.g., Joyce's Finnigans Wake--others,

⁴²Illusion and Reality, pp. 199-201.

⁴³Ibid., p. 201.

⁴⁴Caudwell, Studies, p. 48.

such as Lawrence, Gide, and Romain Rolland, "cannot be content with the beautiful art work, but seem to desert the practice of art for social theory and become novelists of ideas, literary prophets and propaganda novelists." Lawrence and others like him "represent the efforts of bourgeois art, exploded into individualistic phantasy and commercialized muck, to become once more a social process and be reborn."⁴⁵ However, because Lawrence does not understand the nature of consciousness and art's role in creating it--as opposed to social theory, for example,--his revolt is doomed to failure. In order to make art a social process once again, it is necessary to understand just what art's function in the social process is.

For Caudwell, the basic property of art is its creation of "mimic pictures of reality which we accept as illusory," which in turn produce an organized, emotional reaction to that picture of reality (organized by the structure of the work). Thus, not only is emotion generated in response to the "picture" of reality, but the emotions are organized into an "affective attitude." This attitude is not permanent as is, for example, our attitude towards some scientific axiom; however "it remains an experience and must, therefore, in proportion to the amount of conscious poignancy accompanying the experience

⁴⁵Caudwell, loc. cit.

and the nature of the experience, modify the subject's general attitude towards life itself."⁴⁶ Thus art can only "achieve its purpose if the pictures themselves are made simultaneously to produce affect and organization."⁴⁷ This is accomplished through language and its structuring; "the word," as Caudwell says in Illusion and Reality, "has a subjective side (feeling) and an objective side (perception)," which express a "dynamic social act" by the subject's action on the object and the object's action on the subject.⁴⁸

The problem, as Caudwell sees it, is that in language reality is "symbolized in unchanging words, which give a false stability and permanence to the object they represent." Reality is a confusing buzz of change, but words "freeze" reality. Caudwell agrees that this aspect of language is utilitarian and is "probably the only way in which man, with his linear consciousness, can get a grip of fluid reality"; however,

If you coin a word or write a symbol to describe an entity or event, the word will remain "eternally" unchanged even while the entity has changed and the event is no longer present. This permanence is the inescapable nature of symbolism.

Despite this very dubious assumption about the nature of

⁴⁶ Ibid., pp. 49-50.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 50.

⁴⁸ Illusion and Reality, p. 142.

language, one can see the direction in which Caudwell is moving:

The artist experiences this discrepancy between language and reality as follows: he has an intense experience of a rose and wishes to communicate his experience to his fellows in words. He wishes to say, "I saw a rose." But "rose" has a definite social meaning, or group of meanings, and we are forced to suppose that he has had an experience with the rose which does not correspond to any of society's previous experiences of roses, embodied in the word and its history. His experience of the rose is therefore the negation of the word "rose"; it is "not-rose"--all that in his experience which is not expressed in the current social meaning of the word "rose." He therefore says--"I saw a rose like"--and there follows a metaphor, or there is an adjective--"a heavenly rose," or a euphemism--"I saw a flowery blush," and in each case there is a synthesis, for his new experience has become socially fused into society's old experiences and both have taken colour from all past meanings of the word "rose," for these will be present in men's minds when they read his poem, and the word "rose" will have taken colour from his individual experience, for his poem will in [the] future be in men's minds when they encounter the word "rose."⁴⁹

It is through this process that new art is generated; the artist is "constantly finding inherited social conscious formulations inadequate and requiring synthesis."⁵⁰

If valid, Caudwell's observation is a powerful argument against the viewing art primarily as the artist's means of self-expression. Why should the artist struggle to achieve a synthesis between old social forms and his new experience, "why not disregard social formalities and express [oneself] as one does by shouting, leaping, and

⁴⁹ Caudwell, Studies, p. 52.

⁵⁰ Caudwell, loc. cit.

cries?"⁵¹ The concept of art as being essentially a matter of the artist's self-expression rests on the fallacy that there is such a thing as a "pure individual expression"; nor is it true that "the artist nobly forces his self-expression into a social mould for the benefit of society." He explains,

Both attitudes are simply expressions of the old bourgeois fallacy that man is free in freely giving vent to his instincts. In fact the artist does not express himself in art forms, he finds himself therein. He does not adulterate his free self-expression to make it socially current, he finds free self-expression only in the social relations embodied in art.⁵²

The value of art to the artist, then, is that in creating a work of art he gains freedom; he becomes aware of social relationships (i.e., of "necessity"). Moreover, although the value of art to the artist "appears to him of value as self-expression, . . . [it] is not the expression of a self but the discovery of a self. It is the creation of a self."⁵³ The value of art to society is that through it, "emotional adaptation is possible. Man's instincts are pressed in art against the altered mould of reality, and by a specific organization of the emotions thus generated, there is a new attitude, an adaptation."⁵⁴

⁵¹Ibid., p. 53.

⁵²Caudwell, loc. cit.

⁵³Caudwell, loc. cit.

⁵⁴Ibid., pp. 53-54.

This is the social process of art. It makes man conscious of himself and his social relationships. The doctrine of art for art's sake denies this social process.

What does this have to do with Lawrence? Lawrence's significance is due, in part, to his recognition of art as a social process. Caudwell observes,

It is Lawrence's importance as an artist that he was well-aware of the fact that the pure artist cannot exist to-day, and that the artist must inevitably be a man hating cash relationships and the market, and profoundly interested in the relations between persons [i.e., social relations]. Moreover, he must be a man not merely profoundly interested in the relations between persons as they are, but interested in changing them, dissatisfied with them as they are, and wanting newer and fuller values in personal relationships.⁵⁵

Caudwell argues that Lawrence's main concern was not sex at all but social relationships, and he quotes from Lawrence to support his point:

"Anybody who calls my novel (Lady Chatterley's Lover) a dirty sexual novel, is a liar. It's not even a sexual novel; it's phallic. Sex is a thing that exists in the head, its reactions are cerebral, and its processes mental. Whereas the phallic reality is warm and spontaneous--"

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"What ails me is the absolute frustration of my primitive societal instinct. . . . I think societal instinct much deeper than the sex instinct--and societal repression much more devastating. There is no repression of the sexual individual comparable to the repression of the societal man in me, by the individual ego, my own individuality. . . .⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 56.

⁵⁶ Ibid., pp. 57-58.

Caudwell also quotes Lawrence's comments on the Cornish people:

"the old race is still revealed, a race which believed in the darkness, in magic, and in the magic transcendency of one man over another which is fascinating. Also there is left some of the old sensuousness of the darkness and warmth and passionateness of the blood, sudden, incalculable. Whereas they are like insects, gone cold, living only for money, for dirt. They are foul in this. They ought to die.⁵⁷

Caudwell praises Lawrence's analysis and his insights into the nature of bourgeois social relationships. He notes that Lawrence does not see the source of the problem in the relationships themselves, "but in man's consciousness of them. [From Lawrence's perspective] the solution of the individual's needs is then plainly to be found in a return to instinctive living." This presents a problem; if "we are to cast off intellectualism and consciousness we must abandon all symbolism and rationalisation tout court, we must be, and no longer think, even in images." Lawrence's contradiction is that he "again and again consciously formulates his creed in intellectual terms of imagery."⁵⁸ Or, to cite Women in Love, has there ever been a more intellectual and conscious lover than Birkin?

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 58.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 59.

Lawrence's problem--and it is not merely a semantic one--is the result of his "equating consciousness with thinking and unconsciousness with feeling." Caudwell explains, "This is wrong. Both are conscious. No one ever had or could have an unconscious affect or emotion."

(Caudwell takes up this point in detail in his essay on "Consciousness" in Further Studies in a Dying Culture.)

To support his argument that Lawrence does not perceive the distinction he again quotes from Lawrence:

"My great religion is a belief in the blood, in the flesh, as being wiser than the intellect. We can go wrong in our minds. But what our blood feels and believes and says is always true. The intellect is only a bit and bridle. What do I care about knowledge? All I want is to answer to my blood, direct, without fumbling intervention of mind, or moral, or what not. I conceive a man's body as a kind of flame, like a candle flame forever upright and yet flowing: and the intellect is just the light that is shed on the things around, coming God knows how from out of practically nowhere, and being itself, whatever there is around it that it lights up. We have got so ridiculously mindful that we never know that we ourselves are anything--we think there are only the objects we shine upon. And there the poor flame goes on burning ignored to produce this light. And instead of chasing the mystery in the fugitive, half-lighted things outside us, we ought to look at ourselves and say, "My God, I am myself!" That is why I like to live in Italy. The people are so unconscious. They only feel and want, they don't know. We know too much. No, we only think such a lot. . . .!⁵⁹

As Caudwell argues elsewhere, action without consciousness is a characteristic of fascism. It is not without reason that Bertrand Russell warned Lawrence that this sort of

⁵⁹ Ibid., pp. 60-61.

thinking would lead to the concentration camps. In Lawrence's writing, it ends in fascism in Kangeroo, in the fascism of the title character, and in the sacrificial rites in The Plumed Serpent.

From Caudwell's point of view, the whole movement toward primitivism is based on a fallacy. Rather than being enriched because it is unconscious, feeling is dependent upon consciousness. If we want to expand our feelings and emotions we must become more not less conscious. The development of man's sensibilities is parallel with an increase in civilization. The less developed a people, the more violent the stimulation that is needed to arouse their emotions (e.g., "the extremely erotic character of savage dances"). Caudwell believes that Lawrence is correct in perceiving that there is an impoverishment of feeling in modern culture (i.e., feeling is replaced by the cash-nexus); however, it is possible to deepen and broaden emotions without destroying thought or negating consciousness. That, Caudwell argues,

. . . is precisely the purpose of art, for the artist makes use always of just those verbal or pictorial images of reality which are more charged with feeling than cognition, and he organizes them in such a way that the affects re-inforce each other and fuse to a glowing mass. Consequently, he who believes that at all costs the feeling element must be broadened in present-day consciousness, must preach and secure, not the contraction of all consciousness, but the widening of feeling consciousness. This is art's mission. Art is the technique of affective manipulation in relation to reality.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 64.

As an artist, Lawrence was doing just this "when he was artist pure and simple, sensitively recording the spirit of a place or the emotions of real people--in his early work." However, as he became "a prophet, preaching the gospel intellectually, he departed from this goal.⁶¹ Reacting against the intellect and worshipping the unconscious is similar to the bourgeoisie's worship of the "natural man" of Rousseau, the man who acts freely and unconsciously. Both are forms of "infantile regression." Caudwell admits that "social being is held back by social consciousness; the instincts are thwarted and the feelings are made poor by the environment." However, "civilization cannot be cured by going back along the path to the primitive, it can only become at a lower level more unconscious of its decay."⁶² It is not into the past that man must go but into the future, and "the new does not exist, we must bring it into being." We must become conscious of social relations in order to change them, and "social relations must be changed so that love returns to the earth and man is not only wiser but more full of emotion."⁶³

The painter, John Berger, once said of the critic's task, "'First you must answer the question: What can art serve here and now? Then you criticize according to whether

⁶¹Caudwell, loc. cit.

⁶²Ibid., p. 70.

⁶³Ibid., p. 68.

the works in question serve that purpose or not."⁶⁴ I think this is essentially what Caudwell is trying to do in his essay on Lawrence. Caudwell has a theory of art, of the role of the artist and the function of art in society; he understands and evaluates Lawrence's contribution in light of this theory.

Any hypothesis or theory may be judged from a number of perspectives and by several different criteria. Two criteria often used to validate a theory are its explanatory power, particularly its ability to subsume other, competing theories into a "higher" third, and its predictive power. Judged by these two criteria, Marxism, in Caudwell's hands, rates rather high marks, and this is particularly true in Romance and Realism. Like many of his other works, Romance and Realism is a "quarry of ideas"; there are enough insights and incisive readings in this work to sponsor a host of critical studies. In his study of contemporary novelists (ca. 1936), he not only puts writers in their proper historical perspective, but shows how a specific historical context influences technical problems, particularly point of view.

Caudwell contends that Hardy and Kipling, transitional figures, are the last representatives of the classic

⁶⁴ John Berger, Permanent Red (1960), cited from an anonymous review, "What We Might Be and What We Are: John Berger and the Artist's Duty to Transcend Despair," TLS (9 June 1972), 645.

tradition in the novel, a tradition which dates from DeFoe. It is a tradition which became increasingly "subtle and extended." It is a tradition,

in which the novel is a mock world, an objective mimicry of social reality, which the reader or author surveys as a god, peeping into this mind or that, or turning away to pursue for a time his own reflections but, in any case, quite outside it and unconcerned with it as an actor.⁶⁵

Caudwell describes this as "the Newtonian stage" of the novel, since its "closed world" is similar to the equally "closed world of Newtonian physics" (i.e., the Creator is outside the universe, which runs according to absolute laws of matter in motion). The modern novel begins with the assumption of an "epistemological crisis," which manifests itself in a problem of technique--the role of the observer, or "point of view." This crisis in art corresponds to the "crisis" in science, particularly physics, in which the role of the observer begins to assume crucial importance (e.g., in the Michelson-Morely experiment which confirmed Einstein's General Theory and in Heisenberg's Principle of Uncertainty). As Caudwell describes it,

The crisis was the discovery of the relativity of bourgeois norms, hitherto taken as absolute, whether in art, society, or physics. It was the discovery that the mind of the bourgeois observer in which these norms of perception or reflection or action were established, was itself determined by the environment on which it imposed these norms. . . . As it appears to the bourgeois observer, arising

⁶⁵ Romance and Realism, p. 97.

out of his discovery of the repeated failure in practice of established "laws," the situation was that everything was proving either tautologous or relative. The laws of supply and demand depend on human desires. Human desires are moulded by society. Society is subject to the laws of supply and demand. One simply seems to be treading a pointless round.⁶⁶

The problem of the observer became the problem of the modern novel, and almost all of the major novelists-- "James, Conrad, Moore, Bennett, James Joyce, Dorothy Richardson, Hemingway, and Virginia Woolf"--are "technically associated" with this concern. (The notable exception is Lawrence, and Mark Schorer in "Technique as Discovery" cites this as his major weakness.) Moreover, Caudwell claims that it is no coincidence that all of these writers were, in one way or another, "aliens" to the society which figures in their novels. Other critics might argue that this "alien" existence would explain the author's concern with point of view. "Our answer," Caudwell explains, "would be that just because at that time the evolution of culture set the problem of the observer as the most fruitful for narrative, any gifted 'alien' author would, ipso facto, be given a tremendous initial advantage."⁶⁷

With Henry James, the "epistemological problem is primary; it settles the whole book. Through whose eyes is the 'situation' to be seen?"

⁶⁶ Ibid., pp. 97-98.

⁶⁷ Romance and Realism, p. 99.

To James the alien, late bourgeois culture is not something whose norms are innate and natural, but one whose norms are accepted and artificial. This attitude excludes the "normal" observer viewing the world from outside. James' solution takes various forms, and it is always subtle and artistic, never mechanical and imposed. The crux of it is this: "The situation must be seen through the eyes of that observer best qualified to notice and bring out its dramatic [sic.] and significant elements." This formula, which to James ultimately seems inevitable, excludes the absolute observer of Newtonian physics and earlier bourgeois novels (e.g., Flaubertian realism). The observer is now an actor, and this often involves a shift from one observer to another in a story, but it gives far greater subtlety and complexity.⁶⁸

This shift in observer involves an elaborate amount of "epistemological manipulation. One has first to get into the observer's skin, and then the observer has to get into the skins of the observed characters." This strategy "rather than any constitutional factor accounts for the increasing elaboration of James' style."⁶⁹

In Conrad, there is the same problem, but it takes a different form. Conrad is not only an alien to London, he is also an alien to the Asiatic cultures he so often describes. Caudwell observes that "in theory the sailor, the simple romantic man of action, ought to write simply and vigorously. In fact, Conrad writes with extraordinary complexity, endless qualifications, and puzzling shifts of time."⁷⁰ Why? Conrad, alien to bourgeois culture, sees

⁶⁸ Ibid., pp. 100-01.

⁶⁹ Caudwell, loc. cit.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 102.

it and other societies from an alien's point of view. However, he has no "positive" position from which to view these cultures. Hence like James he makes one of his characters--Marlow--an observer. This technique corresponds to Einstein's solution in physics:

The world of physics is to be "closed" by the complicated method of tensors. The various functions of coordinates, which correspond to the various world-views of observers, are to be sifted for a common invariant element, so that the world emerges absolute, and closed. If the situation between characters A, B, and C is described by A who is one of the actors, it seems as if we have the absolute world, the closed world "described in its own terms" and therefore independent of the observer. This is the achievement of Einstein and equally of James and Conrad.⁷¹

The novelist creates his own world which must be described in its own terms and which contains its own system of norms. There is no place for a Thackeray or Trollope here; ethics must come from within, not from without. Caudwell quotes Conrad,

"The ethical view of the universe . . . involves us at last in so many cruel and absurd contradictions . . . that I have come to suspect that the aim of creation cannot be ethical at all. I would fondly believe that its object is purely spectacular: a spectacle for awe, love, adoration, or hate, if you like, but in this view--and in this view alone--never for despair! Those visions, delicious or poignant, are a moral end in themselves."⁷²

In terms of Conrad's art,

⁷¹Caudwell, loc. cit.

⁷²From A Personal Record, cited in Romance and Realism, pp. 102-03.

This rejection of a human view of the universe (which characteristically is considered as necessarily ethical) conceals a complete poverty of internal philosophy and a limitation therefore of possible reactions to reality. Conrad is alien to bourgeoisdom as materially manifested, but he is native to no other culture. As a result, in rejecting its more material manifestations--ethics, utilitarianism, and so forth--he is left with the upper parts of its ideology, its notions of honour, courage, and bourgeois chivalry. These are noble enough in their way, but they are limited tools for tackling the complexities and richness of human society. Hence Conrad as he develops becomes very tortuous and analytical and yet, in the last remove, very simple and unsubtle. His characters, as they grow more and more self determined, become more and more unreal. His world as it is closed to criticism and the author, strangely loses its colour and romance. The world, as "a moral end in itself" becomes de-materialized.⁷³

Caudwell argues that Nostramo is a case in point. Conrad wanted to create a complete town, a society "which is self-determined and exists for itself." However, "such a world turns out to be the least colorful and least romantic of all Conrad's worlds. It marks the climax of Conrad's colourlessness."⁷⁴

Arnold Bennett studies French literature and adopts the stance of "Goncourtian realism and the detached god-like observer," but because he is not troubled by the epistemological problem and has "solid" and "clear" norms, he is obsolete from the very beginning. His characters are unreal; his Londoners act and think with standards drawn from the mid-Victorian period. George Moore begins by

⁷³Romance and Realism, p. 103.

⁷⁴Caudwell, loc. cit.

imitating Bennett; however, "he has not Bennett's hard inner core: he is an ex-Catholic, Irish landowner and therefore cannot have bourgeois values ingrained. He soon slips out of his Flaubertian skin and with it abandons bourgeois culture. He gives up the attempt to portray human relations, and this is in itself a revolt like that of James or Hardy."⁷⁵ The result is the poetic novel, a development of a new style in the novel. Discussing Moore's The Brook Kerith, Aphrodite in Aulis, and Heloise and Abelard, Caudwell illustrates how this sort of novel achieves a "closed world":

This requires above all a rich prose; it is style, the melody of words, the flow, the course and suspension of verbal melody, and the exquisite orchestration of the emotional tones adhering to the words, that carries the narrative on.⁷⁶

However, this kind of novel is successful only in dealing with the past, "for it creates a closed world of art by virtue of the music of the narrative, in which the characters and their world and their relations do not exist in their own right behind the words, but suck their substance from the words themselves. If Moore were to write thus of modern themes, reality would keep breaking in and spoiling the music."⁷⁷ Ultimately this kind of novel fails for want of vitality; the force of a novel for

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 105.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 108.

⁷⁷ Caudwell, loc. cit.

any generation of readers is "the vital meaning it gives of living." By substituting musical organization for life, Moore creates a closed world "that has all the finality of pastoral" and just as much relevance.

Joyce also wrestles with the problem of the observer and constructs a closed world. Exiling himself from Dublin but refusing to acquire any other new standards, Joyce can view Ireland with clinical detachment, but "because he has not acquired a new culture or new standards, he cannot criticize this life, he cannot select it and coordinate it so as to establish an affective attitude towards it. Instead, everything has to go in without organization, selection of incident, or time scale."⁷⁸ But it is the nature of art that everything cannot "go in"; there must be some plan, some selection. Hence Joyce is forced to make mythic parallels to the Odyssey. Caudwell claims that "it is scholastic and formal art."

"A plan implies selection. Selection implies a touchstone for selection which can only be a stable world-view." Caudwell continues,

The world view implies an observer whose perception is conditioned by what he is and what he springs from. So once more we arrive back at the epistemological problem.

Ulysses hopes to exclude the observer with his definite view point, partly because the bourgeois

⁷⁸Ibid., p. 110.

view-point is no longer adequate to the growing complexities of life, partly because Joyce himself has no viewpoint, having abandoned that of the Dublin bourgeois and gained no other. He attempts therefore to create the closed world of art by giving quite simply the whole contents of the mind of the actors.

But how were these contents known? Divinely? No, they were guessed at by the observer, and come therefore from his mind. How were a few out of the innumerable possible selected, and the words selected out of the innumerable in the dictionary to express these selected contexts? By the mind of the observer. . . . We thus find that this method in no way excludes the author; it fills the book with him. Joyce . . . had no consistent viewpoint; his attitude to reality is fluid, hesitating, formless, and unreal. In spite of the gifts of the author, it deliquesces through its immaturity and pedantry, through its lack of experience.⁷⁹

Despite his lack of sympathy with Joyce's achievement, Caudwell finds Joyce's work instructive. Joyce's novels can provide a "methodological rule," which, for the most part, has been hidden to Joyce's successors. In depicting character, the novelist has "(a) The characters' thoughts, analyzed, hinted at, or described," and/or "(b) The characters' words and actions described." However, Caudwell observes:

. . . all the material in a contains more of the author i.e. of the observer, than b. Yet the modern novelist appears to suppose that the opposite is the case, that with a he is less himself and penetrating more deeply into outer reality than with b. But we have gained the outer reality we describe in a novel by experience. As regards other people, we see their words and actions. From these we infer, as a result of our own experiences, their thoughts and aims. Thus there is a larger element of the "I" of the author in a than b; there are two layers of

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 111.

subjectivity instead of one. That is why a novel like Ulysses seems so little objective, seems full of the distortions of the observer, seems all author and no reality, although it attempts to make its ⁸⁰ characters objective through their consciousness.

Whether one agrees with him or not, at least Caudwell can explain why, at a particular historical moment, the problem of point of view arose. Moreover, it seems to me that his comments on James, Moore, and Joyce do account for many of the critical problems involved in an evaluation of these writers. One can consider Joyce's decision to use the Odyssey a stroke of genius, or, like Caudwell, argue that it is "a childish form of organization"; in either case, it is revealing to consider that it was an answer to an epistemological problem as well as an aesthetic choice.

One criterion that was mentioned as a standard for appraising a critical theory was its predictive power. In his discussion of Virginia Woolf, Caudwell displays almost prophetic insight. He describes Dorothy Richardson and Virginia Woolf as "aliens," not aliens in the sense of being expatriates, but aliens in the sense of being women in a man's world and facing the problems of the feminine observer. Caudwell explains,

Their position is substantially this: the woman who becomes culturally conscious becomes an artist and a part of the male economic system--teacher, writer, worker, or intellectual instead of a housewife,

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 112.

daughter, or aunt. She then finds herself to an extent an alien in a "man's world." This world is a vast cognitive expression of man's notion of reality.⁸¹

As long as this male world is "stable and coherent," the women must take on "man's reactions and viewpoints." This need to adapt to a man's world stifles or at least retards woman's creative urge. However, "when this culture begins to collapse, woman is able to adopt a critical attitude towards it. This critical attitude is expressed by Dorothy Richardson, Virginia Woolf, and also Katherine Mansfield." At the same time, their criticism must be "emotional" rather than "intellectual" because "the cognitive elements in culture, as a result of man's scientific role, are masculine. It must be therefore an uncognitive or emotional criticism." But the problem remains, for "bourgeois art also is male and is emotional, so that even here her emotion has to be of a special sort, alien to the emotional formulations of current art, which she regards as slick and artificial (cf. Virginia Woolf's criticism of Bennett and Wells)."⁸²

Unable to accept the forms of male art, she is forced to develop her own style to express her own emotional attitude. Necessarily, "owing to their foreignness and lack of ready-made forms," these emotions seem

⁸¹Ibid., p. 113.

⁸²Caudwell, loc. cit.

"fluid, vague, and tremulous until they have built up a tradition of their own." By the same token these women "have no historic world-view, because the bourgeois world-view is male. They have only a personal world-view springing from their own experience; they cannot, like men, share completely in the personal experience enshrined in art and culture, for these are experiences of men." This feminine role, Caudwell argues,

. . . gives rise to their peculiar art; it is an art of the world seen by Miriam, coloured with her own values, uninterested in what happens to the actors before or after they swim into her ken, for outside her ken they are coloured with alien values; or it is of the world as seen by Mrs. Dalloway, in which all the affective associations are personal and not historic, and therefore seem to men arbitrary and out of proportion, like Jacob's famous boots. But if I ignore tradition and draw only from my personal experiences, the emotional values I attach to events will be influenced entirely by my experience and may therefore seem out of balance and strained.⁸³

The result, of course, is the male stereotype of the "feminine viewpoint and a fixed feminine character." However, there are primitive tribes where women control the economic and social organisation, and, "if such a tribe were able to build up an elaborate culture, the cognitive and traditional artistic culture would of course be feminine. It would then be woman whose art and thought would seem historical, intellectual, clear-cut, and impersonal, and man's which would seem untraditional,

⁸³Ibid., p. 114.

emotional, vague, and individual."⁸⁴

As far as I know, Caudwell is the first critic to examine in detail the role of woman as a writer in contemporary society and the way in which the role she is obligated to play effects her style. Moreover, although this essay was written around 1936, it could have been written today; it has lost none of its persuasiveness. (Caudwell is also sensitive to the portrayal of female characters by male novelists; his comments on Hemingway's treatment of love relationships are devastating.)

Caudwell and the Social Function of Literature

As interesting as some of his critical studies are, Caudwell will not be remembered by most people as a literary critic. At best, his literary criticism constitutes a substantial collection of perceptive insights which need to be developed in greater detail. Moreover, from a formalist perspective, Alick West's almost forgotten Crisis and Criticism contains a far more subtle and useful application of Marxism to the problems of literary analysis. Caudwell's significance in the history of the development of Marxist literary criticism is based on his contribution to literary theory, specifically his formulation of the social function of literature. Drawing on practically every field of intellectual endeavor and attempting to synthesize them

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 115.

all in one, unified world-view, Caudwell demonstrates not only that literature is necessary for the individual and society but how and why it is absolutely vital.

Perhaps the best clue to what Caudwell is trying to do in Illusion and Reality is given in a letter written to some friends, Paul and Betty Beard, in which he describes his own impulse for synthesis:

. . . I think my weakness has been the lack of an integrated Weltanschauung. I mean one that includes my emotional, scientific, and artistic needs. They have been more than usually disintegrated in me, I think, a characteristic of my generation exacerbated by the fact that, as you know, I have strong rationalizing as well as artistic tendencies. As long as there was a disintegration I had necessarily an unsafe provisional attitude to reality, a somewhat academic superficial attitude, which showed in my writing as what Betty has described as the "lack of baking." The remedy is nothing so simple as a working-over and polishing-up of prose, but to come to terms with myself and my environment.⁸⁵

This drive toward integration is characteristic of all Caudwell's work (as it is of Marx's); it is appropriate that one of his tentative titles for Illusion and Reality was "Verse and Mathematics--A Study of the Foundation of Poetry." For Caudwell, all great art "performs a wide and deep feat of integration."⁸⁶

This section of the study will consider Caudwell's formulation of the social function of art. With Margolies, I believe that this is Caudwell's most significant

⁸⁵ Caudwell, "Letter to Paul and Mary Beard (November 1935)," cited in Hynes, p. 13.

⁸⁶ Illusion and Reality, p. 203.

contribution to literary theory. Further, I agree with Margolies that "functional criticism is in many ways the most distinctively Marxist criticism since it reveals a full conception of society, of literature as a whole, and literature's relation to society, rather than approaching criticism through particular critiques."⁸⁷ On the other hand, Marxists have had a difficult time with the concept. While Marxism emphasizes "change," functionalists traditionally speak of "adaptation" or "equilibrium." Functionalism is a development of "bourgeois" social science, and it has only been quite recently that Marxists have felt the need to draw on the discoveries of the classical sociologists. Caudwell is one of the first Marxists to make use of functionalism as it is understood today.

The last part of this section contains a discussion of some of the points Caudwell raises. The discussion here is more detailed and, perhaps, more critical than that of preceding parts of this study. This is not because I consider Caudwell more open to criticism than William Morris or the other Marxist critics of the Thirties. On the contrary, I consider Caudwell to be one of the best Marxist critics of our time. At the same time, a number of Caudwell's methodological and theoretical concepts raise crucial questions having to do with the future

⁸⁷Margolies, p. 13.

development of Marxist literary theory, and my discussion of these ideas attempts to provide some of the foundation for my own speculations in the final chapter of this study.

The basic premise that underlies all of Caudwell's writing is the belief that the ultimate purpose of social institutions, including literature, and, indeed, of society itself should be to aid man in his struggle for freedom. To the extent that institutions function to fulfill this purpose, they are valuable and should be maintained; to the extent that they function to thwart this goal they should be changed. For someone not familiar with Caudwell's work, this may seem a rather vague concept on which to base a whole theory of literature. However, Caudwell has very specific ideas on the nature of freedom and how literature functions to aid man in achieving it. The epigraph which Caudwell chooses for Illusion and Reality is taken from Engels' Anti-Duhring (1878): "Freedom is the recognition of necessity." What Engels means is clear:

Hegel was the first to state correctly the relationship between freedom and necessity. To him, freedom is the appreciation of necessity. "Necessity is blind only in so far as it is not understood." Freedom does not consist in the dream of independence of natural laws, but in the knowledge of these laws, and in the possibility this gives of systematically making them work towards definite ends. This holds good in relation both to the laws of external nature and to those which govern the bodily and mental existence of men themselves--two classes of laws which we can separate from each other at most only in thought but not in reality. Freedom of the will therefore means nothing but the capacity to make decisions with a real knowledge of the subject. Therefore the freer a man's judgment is in relation

to a definite question, with so much the greater necessity is the content of this judgment determined; while the uncertainty, founded on ignorance, which seems to make an arbitrary choice among many different and conflicting possible decisions, shows by this precisely that it is not free, that it is controlled by the very object it should itself control. Freedom therefore consists in the control over ourselves and over external nature which is founded on knowledge of natural necessity; it is therefore necessarily a product of historical development.⁸⁸

This is precisely the meaning which Caudwell attaches to his conception of freedom.

But what does necessity mean? And how do we know that we have knowledge of necessity, i.e., what constitutes knowledge? Caudwell also provides answers to these questions. According to Caudwell, the basic process of the universe is change ("becoming"); hence, "any absolute dichotomy into reality and appearance, space and time, matter and motion, primary and secondary qualities or object and subject, is erroneous and denies the reality of change or existence. Both are intimately blended in becoming."⁸⁹ What one must recognize is that there is a "determining" relationship to all phenomena. "Every quality is an event; every event is a quality. Every quality of event is a relation between the subject A, and the object not-A--the rest of the universe."⁹⁰ That is what is given

⁸⁸ From Selsam and Martel, eds. Reader in Marxist Philosophy, p. 226.

⁸⁹ Further Studies, p. 207.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 225.

in reality, the subject and the object, and they are in determining relationship:

A [subject] and B [object] and the relations between them are all real. The Universe is one, and is as a whole absolutely self-determined, but no part of it is absolutely self-determined. All that is real exists, and all that is real is determined, that is, every part of the Universe is in mutually determining A-B relations with the rest of the Universe. Everything therefore is knowable, for the meaning of knowable is simply this, the possibility of expressing a determining relation between the unknown but knowable thing, and a thing already known. . . . This is our premise: that the Universe is a material unity, and that this is a becoming. The material unity of becoming cannot be established by thought alone. It is established by thought in unity with practice, by thought emerging from practice and going out into practice. Phenomena are exhibited by the thing-in-itself, and if we can by practice force the thing-in-itself to exhibit phenomena according to our desire, then we know this much about the thing-in-itself--that in certain circumstances it will exhibit certain phenomena.

This is positive knowledge about the thing-in-itself.⁹¹

Reality is change, becoming. Reality does not change in space and time, space and time "are aspects of its becoming." However, change is not arbitrary; "each new quality [event], as it leaps into existence, is determined by all qualities up till then present in the Universe." Time is new events as they come into being; "space is quantity or known quality as it remains unchanged; it is therefore the thing-in-itself, the material unity of the Universe. The Universe is a spatial Universe."⁹²

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 218.

⁹² Ibid., pp. 219-20.

Further, becoming involves more than change; it also entails development. "If we had no development, we would have no 'becoming.' In development there is a relation between the qualities, A,B,C,D,E, which is not only mutually determining, but such that A is in some way contained in B, B in C, C in D, and D in E, but not E in D, D in C, C in B, B in A. This relation, which is called 'transitive but assymetrical,' is involved in the process of becoming, just as are the existences of like and unlike."⁹³ Thus, Caudwell is able to formulate a "dialectical law" of becoming, which applies to all qualities, i.e., all events:

Any new quality, as it emerges, is determined by (or "contains") a prior quality (the cause) and the rest of the Universe of qualities. Or, more strictly,--since becoming is logically prior to time and space--the two terms determining a quality, (a) the prior quality and (b) all other determining qualities, are to that quality cause and ground, and contain its past time and its surrounding space. All other qualities not contained in this way are part of its effect, and contain its future time. . . . Every new quality (B) is the synthesis of an opposition between (A) the cause, prior quality or thesis, and its negation (not-A), or antithesis--the rest of the Universe of qualities existent in relation to A.⁹⁴

Hence, every distinction of quality--e.g., "mind, truth, colour, size"--"is a discernment of a two-term relation between a thing as subject and the rest of the Universe."⁹⁵

⁹³ Further Studies, p. 221.

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 223.

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 228.

Caudwell is not arguing for strict causality as such; his concept of becoming simply implies that there is "a kind of hierarchical or systematic connection of all things." Using an analogy drawn from mathematics, in which "domain" is substituted for "quality" or "event," he argues that "it is this universal interweaving of domains, and not the concept of strict determinism as such, which enables us to speak of laws and the universal reign of laws:

A law is a domain system. The universal reign of law merely means that every integer forms part of some domain. It does not mean that any one law ingathers all reality. Precisely because a law is most universal, it is the smallest ingredient in the largest number of integers, as for example unity. This does not rob it of its determinative predictivity. The Law of Conservation of Momentum is universal, although it says little more than unity. But precisely because of its universality, it tells us least about quality. Domains make possible abstractness and generalization, and they do so precisely because they delete the greatest amount of newness, individuality and concreteness. Integers concretify time.⁹⁶

Now man can gain freedom by becoming conscious of these determining relationships. "Man is free because and in so far as he can experience his causal relation to the Universe not objectively, but in its fullness, in a higher richness, as knowing subject. Freedom then is the consciousness of determinism. . . . But Man can only become

⁹⁶ Christopher Caudwell, The Crisis in Physics (New York: Dodd Mead and Co., 1939), pp. 146-47.

conscious of determinism by his consciousness of causal relation. And this at once makes consciousness a unity with practice, with action upon Nature."⁹⁷ Animals are not free because they are ignorant of necessity; they are at the mercy of nature and their own unconscious instincts. Caudwell argues that "freedom in personal consciousness is the same recognition of necessity." He continues,

Activity wherever it is seen as an object (as when I objectively regard my body as being pushed) appears as the causal relation, but it then is already part of the past and its quality has become quantity; it has fallen into the province of certainty. It has become determined; it is the causal relation, theatre of power and activity, as it sinks into determinism. It passes away, not completely, but into the ground of a new quality. But activity as freedom is the causal relation as experienced by the subject, and this consciousness already lifts it into a new domain. And this freedom is inseparable from the passage into the defect--i.e., into practice.⁹⁸

Caudwell admits that not all causal relations are conscious, and he discusses Freud's assertion that unconscious motives often "sway the will." To the extent that unconscious motives hold power over man's will, he is unfree; thus, the path to freedom "consists in making those motives conscious. Once again freedom is the consciousness of cause. But this is true also of outside causes which unconsciously affect man's will."⁹⁹ Or, as Freud himself

⁹⁷ Ibid., pp. 217-18.

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 220.

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 221.

says, "Where there is Id shall be Ego." Science and art can aid man in bringing these determining relationships and motives into consciousness.

In his study of D. H. Lawrence, Caudwell argues that art has the "mission" of educating man's emotional life. On its most basic level, it is art's task to "secure, not a contraction of all consciousness, but the widening of feeling consciousness."¹⁰⁰ Consciousness arises in experience, in the subject's action on his environment and the environment's action on the subject; it is a result of interaction and is a guide to action; it is "change," it is the ingression of the new."¹⁰¹ The artist and the reader in experiencing a work of art encounter the new; their consciousness is changed. For the artist, his "inner self" has been "pressed" against "the mold of social relations" (i.e., old social forms); he becomes conscious of society's determining relations.¹⁰² The reader is emotionally manipulated by the experience, and he too becomes conscious of other "selves" and determining social relationships. "Man's instincts are pressed in art against the altered mould of reality [i.e., the result of tension arising from "old conscious formulations--the art 'form'-and new individual experience made conscious--the

¹⁰⁰ Studies, p. 64.

¹⁰¹ Further Studies, p. 92.

¹⁰² Studies, p. 53.

art 'content' or the artist's message"], and by a specific organization of the emotions thus generated, there is a new attitude, an adaptation."¹⁰³ The important point to note here is that, for Caudwell, the experience of art (both for the artist and his audience) is an experience of reality, social reality. As Caudwell says, "The artist takes bits of reality [embedded in language], socially known, to which affective [i.e., emotional] associations adhere, and creates a mock world, which calls into being a new affective attitude, a new emotional experience."¹⁰⁴ The emotional experience is as real as any other experience; it changes one's life.

It follows then that art is also a guide to action. Science can give man truth, or at least a hypothesis by which he can interact with his environment out of which truth can emerge. Truth is generated in action. However, before man can act he must want to act, there must be desire, a goal. Science gives man a "community of perceptions." But in order for social as well as individual action "there must be a community of desire as well as a community of perception. There must be a community of instinct, as well as a community of cognition. The heart, as well as the reason, must be social. The community must share a body in common, as well as an environment in

¹⁰³Ibid., pp. 53-54.

¹⁰⁴Further Studies, p. 110.

common. Its hopes as well as its beliefs must be one."¹⁰⁵

The artist creates the hopes and desires by the creation of beauty. Beauty as Caudwell defines it is that which

. . . arises from the social ordering of the affective elements in socially known things. It arises from the labour process, because there must not only be agreement about the nature of outer reality, but also agreement about the nature of desire. This agreement is not static. In the social process, outer reality becomes increasingly explored, and this makes the social process more far-reaching and deeply entrenched in the environment, while each fresh sortie into reality alters the nature of desire, so that here too fresh integrations are necessary. This pressure, both in science and art, appears an individual experience. A scientist inherits the hypothesis and an artist inherits the traditions, of the past. In the scientist's case an experiment, and in the artist's case a vital experience indicates a discrepancy, a tension, whose synthesis results in a new hypothesis or a new art work.¹⁰⁶

This is what art is: the manipulation or "social ordering" of desires as a result of the tension between the artist's new experience and old social forms (i.e., tradition).

The artist changes our consciousness, the way we feel about reality, our hopes and fears. In his essay on "Liberty," Caudwell puts the matter clearly, "Science is the means by which man learns what he can do, and therefore it explores the necessity of outer reality. Art is the means by which man learns what he wants to do, and therefore it explores the essence of the human heart."¹⁰⁷

At this stage of his development of his theory of function, Caudwell is still struggling with the nature of

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 102.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 108.

¹⁰⁷ Studies, p. 228.

dialectics, and the relationship between theory and practice. As Margolies observes,

Economy changes the world, while art and science reveal the reality which man must take into account in order to make that change. Freedom is based on the recognition of necessity: science deals with outer necessity; art with those of inner necessity. Art, as part of theory, makes man conscious of the causality involved in his emotions, enabling him to act freely, i.e., to decide consciously what he wants and to go about getting it through economy. Thus art, in this explanation, is theoretical; it is rather a preparation for action--it does not do anything.¹⁰⁸

Caudwell originates most of these concepts in his Studies and Further Studies. Almost all of them are carried over into Illusion and Reality where they are developed and refined.

In Illusion and Reality, Caudwell makes a major conceptual advance in his theory of function; he begins to see literature (specifically poetry) as a practical activity. Poetry not only has its origins in man's productive relations and is dependent on man's economic development, but poetry itself is an economic activity; it has an economic function. This is a significant development in Marxist aesthetics. In William Morris' work, for example, art was regarded as passively dependent on economic conditions; Morris did not see art itself as having a functional role in determining social relations. Other Marxists, such as Plekhanov, Trotsky, Lenin, Charques,

¹⁰⁸Margolies, p. 47.

Henderson, Fox, and West (to a lesser degree) saw art as either a "reflection" of economic conditions (i.e., based on Marx's dictum that social existence determines consciousness) or as a weapon in the class struggle.

However, Caudwell argues that theory cannot be separated from practice. It is "Marx's realisation of this," Caudwell says, that "led to the conception of the subject-object relation as an active one--man's theory as the outcome of practice on the object, sensing as the sensing of something. Theory was seen to be generated by the struggle of man and the subject with nature the object."¹⁰⁹ It follows, then, that "culture cannot be separated from economic production or poetry from social organization. . . . Poetry is to be regarded, then, not as anything racial, national, genetic or specific in its essence, but as something economic."¹¹⁰ The significance of this statement should not be overlooked; as Margolies comments,

Traditionally Marxists have regarded culture as economic insofar as they have seen culture as being economically determined but they have not regarded it as being itself economic. It is an immense step for Caudwell to say that poetry is economic in its essence. Caudwell really means this: not only is poetry a product of economic development and has economic origin, but it has an economic function. He does not mean that

¹⁰⁹ Illusion and Reality, p. 8.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. 16.

poetry is part of the economic basis of society or is indistinguishable from economy proper but that it has a function in the economic life of society. It is important in the direction and allocation of social effort which, certainly, must be seen as economic.¹¹¹

How does poetry fulfill this economic function? Basing his assumptions on the work of cultural anthropologists such as Malinowski, Caudwell studies the origin and function of poetry in primitive tribes and comes to the conclusion that poetry directs the economic life of the tribe through its function as a communal, socializing medium. The "communal" function of poetry is implicit in its very nature; this is what distinguishes it from ordinary speech. Caudwell defines poetry as a "heightened form of ordinary speech" (a provisional definition), which can be distinguished by its formal structure--"meter, rhyme, alliteration, lines of equal syllabic length, regular stress or quantity, assonance--devices that distinguish it from ordinary speech and give it a mysterious perhaps magical emphasis. There are repetitions, metaphors, and antithesis which, because of their formality we regard as essentially poetic."¹¹² Non-rhythmical language--i.e., ordinary speech--also has a function. It is born in the need for man to communicate with his fellow men, to express himself and to persuade them to follow him.

¹¹¹Margolies, p. 57.

¹¹²Illusion and Reality, p. 13.

Poetry, however, is sung in unison; this is made possible by its rhythmic nature. It is the expression of "collective emotion." Caudwell explains it:

The function of non-rhythmical language, then, was to persuade. Born as a personal function, an extension of one individual volition, it can be contrasted with the collective spirit of rhythmical language, which draws in primitive society all its power from its collective appearance. Poetry's very rhythm makes its group celebration more easy, as for example in an infants' class, which imposes prosody upon the multiplication table it recites, making mathematics poetical.

As with all polar opposites the two interpenetrate, but on the whole the non-rhythmical language, based on everyday speech, is the language of private persuasion, and rhythmical language, the language of collective speech, is the language of public emotion. This is the most important difference in language at the level of primitive culture.¹¹³

One might respond to Caudwell's argument by asking why it is necessary that a tribe have "collective emotions." Any direct stimulus which involves the tribe as a whole will trigger a group response. Confronted with danger, the tribe will respond by being afraid; no poetry is necessary to create this reaction. Caudwell agrees; poetry is not necessary in this situation. However, poetry is "socially necessary" in the absence of any direct stimulus, "when no visible or tangible cause exists, and yet such a cause is potential." "This," explains Caudwell, "is how poetry grows out of the economic life of a tribe, and how illusion grows out of reality."¹¹⁴ To illustrate

¹¹³ Ibid., p. 26.

¹¹⁴ Caudwell, loc. cit.

his point, Caudwell discusses the function of art in tribal agriculture:

Unlike the life of beasts, the life of the simplest tribe requires a series of efforts which are not instinctive, but which are demanded by the necessities of a non-biological economic aim--for example a harvest. Hence the instincts must be harnessed to the needs of the harvest by a social mechanism. An important part of this mechanism is the group festival, the matrix of poetry, which frees the stores of emotion and canalises them in a collective channel. The real object the tangible aim--a harvest--becomes in the festival a phantastic object. The real object is not here now. The phantastic object is here now--in phantasy. As man by the violence of the dance, the screams of music and the hypnotic rhythm of the verse is alienated from present reality, which does not contain the unsown harvest, so he is projected into the phantastic world in which these things phantastically exist. That world becomes more real, and even when the music dies away the ungrown harvest has a greater reality for him, spurring him on to the labours necessary for its accomplishment.

Thus poetry, combined with dance, ritual, and music, becomes the great switchboard of instinctive energy of the tribe, directing it into trains of collective actions whose immediate causes or gratifications are not in the visual field and which are not automatically decided by instinct.¹¹⁵

Caudwell has touched on this problem in his essay on "Beauty" in Studies in a Dying Culture. It is similar to Malinowski's discussion of the function of magic, where magic is considered a symbolic act which allows the tribe to organize "those domains of human activity where experience has demonstrated to man his pragmatic impotence."¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p. 27.

¹¹⁶ Malinowski, Coral Gardens and Their Magic, II, 239.

Tribal lore can inform the people where and how to plant their crops, but some emotional stimulus is needed to make them desire to act together. Man does not choose to organize verbal patterns around his economic activity, he must do so in order to insure that these activities do not degenerate into panic, chaos, or self-destruction. Further, no single man is capable of gathering the harvest; there must be an organized social effort if it is to succeed. The social emotions necessary for social action are generated in poetry.

In addition, Caudwell draws much of his argument from his reading of Freud and his own elaboration of the concept of the "genotype." When organized, social action is necessary, collective "obligations" demand that the individual subordinate his will to the collective desires of the tribe. At the same time, there is no "instinct" which demands that the individual do this. As Caudwell explains, "Ants and bees store instinctively; but man does not. Beavers construct instinctively; not man. It is necessary to harness man's instincts to the mill of labour, to collect his emotions and direct them into the useful, the economic channel. Just because it is economic, i.e., non-instinctive, this instinct must be directed. The instrument which directs them is therefore economic in origin."¹¹⁷ Caudwell defines instinct as "a simple

¹¹⁷ Illusion and Reality, p. 27.

repetition of hereditary habits, the mechanical reappearance of the old";¹¹⁸ as such, they are unconscious.

(Situations which evoke instinctual responses but which do not permit the responses to function unchanged, i.e., which "cause a suspension or interruption of the pattern, produce affects or emotions.")¹¹⁹ The genotype is "the more or less common set of instincts in each man, the biological make-up with which he is born."¹²⁰ It refers to the "more dumb and instinctive part of man's consciousness," and hence, is "undifferentiated because it is relatively unchanging."¹²¹ The genotype "is never found 'in the raw.' Always it is found as a man of definite concrete civilization with definite opinions, material surroundings, and education--a man with a consciousness conditioned by the relations he has entered into with other men and which he did not choose but was born into." By the same token, the genotype is not "completely plastic and amorphous. It has certain definite instincts and potentialities which are the source of its energy and its restlessness."¹²² It is poetry which channels the instinctive energy of the genotype into social action.

¹¹⁸ Further Studies, p. 90.

¹¹⁹ Caudwell, loc. cit.

¹²⁰ Illusion and Reality, p. 124.

¹²¹ Ibid., pp. 204-05.

¹²² Ibid., p. 136.

Poetry collects social emotion through its medium--language--and its rhythm:

Words, in ordinary social life, have acquired emotional associations for each man. These words are carefully selected, and the rhythmical arrangement makes it possible to chant them in unison, and release their emotional associations in all the vividness of collective existence. Music and the dance co-operate to produce an alienation from reality which drives on the whole machine of society. Between the moments when the emotion is generated and raised to a level where it can produce "work," it does not disappear. The tribal individual is changed by having participated in the collective illusion. He is educated--i.e. adapted to tribal life.¹²³

These emotions are experienced by the whole tribe, and thus they are "objective." Further, this "emotional complex" is neither material reality or ideal illusion; "it is social reality. It expresses the social relation of man's instincts to the ungathered fruit [i.e. the harvest]. These instincts have generated these emotions just because they have not blindly followed the necessities of collective action to a common economic end. The phantasy of poetry is social phantasy."¹²⁴ It is the "contradiction" between natural man (the genotype) and "civilized" man (social man) that makes poetry necessary and gives it its meaning and validity.

Phantasy, as Caudwell uses the term, functions much the same way as Coleridge's "willing suspension of

¹²³ Ibid., pp. 27-28.

¹²⁴ Ibid., p. 32.

disbelief." It is a characteristic of all art, and it is one of the elements of art which distinguishes it from "true" religion and myth. The reader or the listener,

accepts the phantasy as expressing objective reality while immersed in the phantasy, but, once the phantasy is over, he does not demand that it be still treated as the real world. He does not demand a correspondence between the experiences of what he calls his real life. . . . Because of this the poet and his hearer are not faced with the problem of integrating the mock worlds of poetry with the real world of everyday existence on the basis of the logical laws of thought--which by no means implies that no integration of any kind takes place. But the poem or novel is accepted as illusion. We give to the statements of poetic art only a qualified assent, and therefore reality has no vested interest in them. Because of this there is no barrier to the fluent production which is the life of art in all ages.¹²⁵

Because it is accepted as illusion, poetry can change, develop, experiment. Religion cannot be accepted as illusion, and as a consequence, can change only with great difficulty.

Similarly, art can be distinguished from mythology.

Originally, art and mythology performed like tasks:

The world of literary art is the world of tribal mythology become sophisticated and complex and self-conscious because man, in his struggle with Nature, has drawn away from her, and laid bare her mechanism and his own by a mutual reflexive action. Mythology with its ritual, and art with its performances, have similar functions--the adaptation of man's emotions to the necessities of social cooperation. Both embody a confused perception of society, but an accurate feeling of society.¹²⁶

¹²⁵ Ibid., p. 35.

¹²⁶ Ibid., p. 36.

The distinction between the two is based on Caudwell's assertion that "because mythology so interpenetrates the daily life of the primitive, it demands no overt, formal assent [i.e., as religion does]. No Holy Inquisition rams it down people's throats."¹²⁷ It is not a matter of "formal assent"; myth is the reality, the truth. All events, no matter how strange, can be incorporated into the myth (e.g., the cargo cults of some contemporary primitive tribes). It has "a 'self-righting' tendency; it remains on the whole true; it reflects accurately the collective emotional life of the tribe in its relations with the environment to the degree in which the tribe's own interpenetration of its environment in economic production makes accuracy possible." However, reality changes faster than myth, and because mythology must be accepted as true, it "ceases to grow and change and contradict itself, and is set up as something rigid and absolutely true."¹²⁸ It becomes ideology.

Before this happens, both science and poetry "separate out of mythology by an initial division of labour so that each can be better developed."¹²⁹ Both science and art originate in the social process, and both have the same function--to aid man in achieving freedom.

¹²⁷ Caudwell, loc. cit.

¹²⁸ Ibid., pp. 36-37.

¹²⁹ Ibid., p. 154.

Both are "guides to action." They are, in a sense, two halves of one world, an abstract world, "made solid and living by the inclusion of the concrete living of men, from which they are generated." In the following two paragraphs, Caudwell makes the different functions of science and art clear:

(1) Science makes available for the individual a deeper more complex insight into outer reality. It modifies the perceptual content of his consciousness so that he can move about a world he more clearly and widely understands; and this penetration of reality extends beyond his dead environment to human beings considered objectively that is, as objects of his action, as the anvil to his hammer. Because this enlarged and complex world is only opened up by men in association--being beyond the task of one man--it is a social reality, a world common to all men. Hence its enlargement permits the development of associated men to a higher plane at the same time as it extends the freedom of the individual. It is the consciousness of the necessity of outer reality.

(2) The other world of art, of organized emotion attached to experience, the world of the social ego that endures all and enjoys all and by its experience organises all, makes available for the individual a whole new universe of inner feelings and desire. It exposes the endless potentiality of the instincts and the "heart" by revealing the various ways in which they may adapt themselves to experience. It plays on the inner world of emotion as on a stringed instrument. It changes the emotional content of his conscious so that he can react more subtly and deeply to the world. This penetration of inner reality, because it is achieved by men in association and has a complexity beyond the task of one man to achieve, also exposes the hearts of his fellow men and raises the whole communal feeling of society to a new plane of complexity. It makes possible new levels of conscious sympathy, understanding and affection between men, matching the new levels of material organisation achieved by economic production. Just as in the rhythmic introversion of the tribal dance each performer retired into his heart, into the fountain of his instincts, to share in common

with his fellows not a perceptual world but a world of instinct and blood-warm rhythm, so to-day the instinctive ego of art is the common man into which we retire to establish contact with our fellows. Art is the consciousness of the necessity of the instincts.¹³⁰

Between science and art stands rhetoric. If one "has an instinctive urge" to act, then rhetoric explains the nature of outer reality in order that "he will see the necessity of doing the particular things to which we wish to persuade him." By the same token, if the situation clearly calls for action, "our permission is directed to arousing the emotional urge to fulfill the action." Existing between the poles of science and art, "rhetoric is the universal mode of language through which men freely guide and lead each other by appealing in day-to-day activity on the one hand to the necessities of the task, and on the other hand to the demands of the instincts." Thus, language, whether the language of science, art, or rhetoric "communicates not simply a dead image of outer reality but also and simultaneously an attitude towards it, and does so because all experience, all life, all reality emerges consciously in the course of man's struggle with Nature."¹³¹

Theoretically, then, with science and art fulfilling their functions, man should be free, or at least in

¹³⁰ Ibid., pp. 154-55.

¹³¹ Ibid., p. 157.

the process of achieving his freedom. But something has gone wrong; man is not free. Why? Caudwell argues that in the process of man's historical development, in his struggle with nature, with the consequent increasing division of labour and the specialization of functions, religion, science, and art cease to be "the collective product of the tribe and become a product of the ruling class."¹³² In order to understand this fully, it is necessary to examine Caudwell's interpretation of Marx's concept of the relationship between the base and superstructure of society and Caudwell's theory of "creative" revolution. In his essay, "Men and Nature: A Study in Bourgeois History," Caudwell interprets Marx's concept of the superstructure:

Because laws, science, languages, arts, distribution systems, moralities, and all the social relations and status arrangements connected therewith, are as it were the most generalised, the most social, the most recent, and the furthest removed from nature of all economic products, they form the superstructure of the most abstract portion of history. They form the theory of human life, the consciousness of society, the visible flower of activity; but they grow from, are nourished by, and are a new aspect of living, breathing, working, active men.¹³³

Changes in productive forces (new techniques, discoveries) sooner or later influence the entire superstructure. "Or," Caudwell explains, "we may say . . . that when associated

¹³² Ibid., p. 39.

¹³³ Further Studies, p. 148.

men immediately in interaction with nature discover discrepancies between theory and practice, immediate theory is modified accordingly--('technological improvement')--and as the minor discrepancies accumulate, theories more and more general or 'social' in scope are affected, until ultimately the whole superstructure is modified--'ideological development.'"¹³⁴ This process is usually gradual in its development. However, in his studies of various revolutions, Marx discovered that during a revolution the "whole superstructure, as if with explosive force, was rapidly shattered and transformed. Laws, sciences, arts, rights, distribution systems--all were involved in one stupendous explosion, lasting for one or two centuries, like the slow motion film of a bursting bomb." According to Caudwell, this could imply only one thing:

. . . for some reason an insulating gap had opened between the superstructure (theory) and the basis (practice) so that practice could not continually modify theory. As a result the antagonism had grown and the tension had at least become so terrific that the resultant explosion had shattered almost every portion of the old superstructure. An obvious example was the bourgeois revolution which inaugurated the "modern era."¹³⁵

This antagonism develops with the increasing division of labor and society's division into antagonistic classes; the conflict between "conscious superstructure" and "active technique" is a conflict which "reflects

¹³⁴ Ibid., pp. 148-49.

¹³⁵ Ibid., p. 149.

society's economic production." He continues,

One class directs economic production consciously and by so doing is able to direct the flow of the bulk of society's economic products into its life. The other class is directed and exploited. The directive, conscious class is the class that produces the consciousness of society; the super-structure is the product of the exploiting class.¹³⁶

On the other hand, the class which undertakes the actual labor of society is constantly interacting with nature and social reality; it is this class which "handles the productive forces of society. The ruling class only came into being because its members performed a socially useful function, by directing the labour they increased the productive efficiency of society as a whole." In the beginning this new class structure produces increased wealth. However, as society develops, so does class conflict:

There is a growing division between thinking and acting, between the exploiters and the exploited. Theory flies apart from practice; the ruling class become less functional and more parasitic, contemplative and idealistic, and the exploited class more and more become the sole controllers of the productive forces of society at the same time as they become more and more divorced from its products. The productive forces as they develop indicate the increasing technical power of man and his increasingly practical experience of reality, but since the productive forces are the domain of the exploited, and the theory or super-structure is the creation of the exploiting class, there is only generated a growing antagonism between theory and practice, evident in an increasing divorce of man's professions from reality.¹³⁷

¹³⁶ Ibid., p. 150.

¹³⁷ Ibid., pp. 150-51.

This antagonism grows, and every development of the productive forces reveals cracks in the superstructure and, at the same time, makes the class which produced it cling to it more fiercely. The superstructure becomes "transformed through the necessities of the class which begot it, and it becomes transformed into a class fortress and a base for reaction, counter-revolution and Fascism." This cannot go on forever. Ultimately, a "revolution occurs when the exploited class, operating the productive forces of society revolts and shatters the whole superstructure."¹³⁸ The revolution is not anarchical. The exploited class during its struggle with nature and its control of the productive forces, has found it necessary to develop its own superstructure, and "by the time a revolutionary situation has matured, there is a whole new superstructure, latent in the exploited class, arising from all they have learned from the development of the productive forces." This becomes the superstructure of a new society "which therefore is one which starts on a higher plane than that of the overthrown society. This is the creative role of revolutions."¹³⁹ In his Crisis in Physics, Caudwell argues for the class nature of science, as Marx and Engels say in The German Ideology,

¹³⁸ Ibid., p. 151.

¹³⁹ Ibid., p. 152.

The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas: i.e. the class, which is the ruling material force in society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it. The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships, the dominant material relationships grasp as ideas; hence of the relationships which make the one class the ruling one, therefore the ideas of its dominance. The individuals composing the ruling class possess among other things consciousness, and therefore think. In so far, therefore, as they rule as a class and determine the extent and compass of an epoch, it is self-evident that they do this in their whole range, hence among other things rule also as thinkers, as producers of ideas, and regulate the production and distribution of the ideas of their age: thus their ideas are the ruling ideas of the epoch.¹⁴⁰

The function of art and science, then, must be seen in light of the context in which they operate in specific societies. In modern times, art is the product of the ruling class, the bourgeoisie. It expresses the world-view of a class whose social relations are founded on capitalism. This is not to say that all art is bourgeois art. On the contrary, in Romance and Realism, he argues that the best poetry and fiction in the twentieth century has been produced by writers who are "alien" to bourgeois culture. However, these artists produce for a limited audience; most people have never heard of James Joyce, let alone read Ulysses. And even these writers

¹⁴⁰Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, The German Ideology, p. 39.

must struggle to see beyond the horizon of the ruling superstructure. Be that as it may, the art which reaches millions is the art conveyed through the mass media: cinema, newspapers, magazines, radio, and television. Big business (or the government) finances the production and distribution of mass media; direct exploitation has been transformed into subtle, psychological manipulation. The primary function of the art carried in the mass media is to perpetuate the status quo through social conformism. As Paul Lasarsfeld and Robert K. Merton explain,

Since the mass media are supported by great business concerns geared into the current social and economic system, the media contribute to the maintenance of that system. This contribution is not found merely in the effective advertisement of the sponsor's product. It arises, rather, from the typical presence in magazine stories, radio programs and newspaper columns [and television] some element of confirmation, some element of approval of the present structure of society. And this continuing reaffirmation underscores the duty to accept.

To the extent that the media of mass communication have had an influence upon their audiences, it has stemmed not only from what is said, but more significantly from what is not said. For these media not only continue to affirm the status quo but, in the same measure, they fail to raise essential questions about the structure of society. Hence, by leading toward conformism and by providing little basis for critical appraisal of society, the commercially sponsored mass media indirectly but effectively restrain the cogent development of a genuinely critical outlook.¹⁴¹

¹⁴¹Paul Lazarsfeld and Robert K. Merton, "Mass Communication, Popular Taste and Organized Social Action," first pub. in The Communication of Ideas, ed. Lyman Bryson (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1948), pp. 95-118, reprinted in Mass Culture: The Popular Arts in America, eds. Bernard Rosenberg and David Manning White (New York: The Free Press, 1957), p. 465.

Paradoxically, art and science which should function to aid man in his struggle for freedom become, instead, the instruments of his oppression.

Caudwell also distinguishes between poetry and the novel by analyzing the difference between their social functions. This distinction was touched on briefly in the discussion of D. H. Lawrence; however, it is more complex than I indicated in that essay. As with his general theory, Caudwell draws heavily on psychology and physiology as well as Marxism. According to Caudwell, the essence of poetry is its rhythm. It is rhythm which "secures the heightening of physiological consciousness so as to shut out sensory perception of the environment." Poetry, dance, music, and song--all function to create "self-consciousness instead of consciousness. The rhythm of heart-beat and breathing and physiology periodicity negates the physical rhythm of the environment"; this is similar to what happens in sleep. The effect of this rhythm is to produce "physiological introversion"; however, this is not simply a turning-away from the present environment. As Caudwell explains it,

Ordinarily we see, hovering behind language the world of external reality it describes. But in poetry the thoughts are to be directed on to the feeling-tone of the words themselves. Attention must sink below the pieces of external reality symbolised by the poetry, down into the emotional underworld adhering to those pieces. In poetry we must penetrate behind the dome of many-coloured glass into the white radiance of the self. Hence the need for a physiological introversion, which

is a turning away not from the immediate environment of the reader but from the environment (or external reality) depicted in the poem. Hence poetry in its use of language continually distorts and denies the structure of reality to exalt the structure of the self. By means of rhyme, assonance or alliteration it couples together words that have no rational connection, that is, no nexus through the world of external reality. It breaks the words up into lines of arbitrary length, cutting across their logical construction. It breaks down their associations, derived from the world of external reality, by means of inversion and every variety of artificial stressing and counterpoint.

Thus the world of external reality recedes, and the world of instinct, the affective emotional linkage behind the words, rises to the view and becomes the world of reality. The subject emerges from the object: and social ego from the social world.¹⁴²

The novel also makes us turn away from external reality. However, it substitutes a "mock reality which has sufficient 'stuff' to stand between the reader and reality." Moreover, it is just that "stuff" (scenes, action, characters, etc.) that the reader is interested in, not the words themselves; that is why a "poetic style" is distracting. Poetry, because it concentrates upon the emotional overtones of the words themselves rather than the symbolized reality (and then to the feeling-tone of that reality), focuses on "the more dumb and instinctive common part of man's consciousness. It is an approach to the secret unchanging core of the genotype in man."¹⁴³ Poetry is the creation of the tribe; it has its origins in the undifferentiated tribal existence "where life flows

¹⁴² Illusion and Reality, p. 200.

¹⁴³ Ibid., p. 204.

on without much change between youth and age."¹⁴⁴ By contrast,

. . . the novel goes out first to reality to draw its subjective associations from it. Hence, we do not seem to feel the novel "in us," we do not identify our feelings with the feeling-tones of the novel. We stand inside the mock-world of the novel and survey it; at the most we identify ourselves with the hero and look round with him at the "otherness" of his environment. The novel does not express the general tension between the instincts and the surroundings, but the changes of tension which take place as a result of change in surroundings (life experience). This incursion of the time element (reality as process) so necessary in a differentiated society where men's time-experiences differ markedly among themselves, means that the novel must particularise and have characters whose actions and feelings are surveyed from without. Poetry is internal--a bundle of "I" perspectives of the world taken from one point of view, the poet. The story is external--a bundle of perspectives of one "I" (the character) taken from different parts of the world.

Obviously the novel can only evolve in a society where men's experiences do differ so markedly among themselves as to make this objective approach necessary, and this difference of experience is itself the result of rapid change in society, of an increased differentiation of functions, of an increased realisation of life as process and dialectic.¹⁴⁵

This explains, for Caudwell at least, why the novel is the particular creation of the bourgeoisie. In terms of aiding man's struggle for freedom, poetry expresses man's freedom in unity; the novel expresses man's freedom in difference. Or, in Caudwell's words,

Poetry expresses the freedom which inheres in man's general timeless unity in society; it

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 205.

¹⁴⁵ Caudwell, loc. cit.

is interested in society as the sum and guardian of common instinctive tendencies; it speaks of death, love, sorrow and despair as all men experience them. The novel is the expression of that freedom which men seek, not in their unity but in their differences, of their search for freedom in the pores of society, and therefore of their repulsions from, clashes with and concrete motions against other individuals different from themselves.¹⁴⁶

The preceding discussion has attempted to give a description of Caudwell's major contribution to Marxist literary criticism, his general theory of the social function of literature. For Caudwell, all art is basically emotional and, hence, focuses on the instincts (i.e., the contradiction between the instincts and the environment) whose adaptation to social life creates emotional consciousness. Illusion and Reality contains other insights which raise issues which fall outside the scope and focus of this study. Besides a schematic history of English poetry from a Marxist perspective, Caudwell also provides an analysis of the relationship between art and dream, art and contemporary theories of psychoanalysis and psychopathology. He discusses the future of poetry and art in general, as well as the organization of the arts themselves. In all of these areas Caudwell attempts to synthesize the findings of other scholars with his own Marxism. It is a remarkable tour de force.

¹⁴⁶Illusion and Reality, pp. 206-07.

When Illusion and Reality appeared, it received little critical notice. H. A. Mason reviewed it for Scrutiny and put it in a class with other Marxist interpretations of literature, saying, "As a class, these books have no intrinsic interest. Nor do they enrich a body of Marxist thought." He concluded his review by remarking, "It would be difficult to do justice to the unreadability of this book and to the irrelevance of most of the subject matter. . . . this large volume might be reduced to pamphlet form without suffering in cogency or even to the original apercus of Marx from which it attempts to develop."¹⁴⁷ Writing from a different critical (and political) point of view, W. H. Auden had high praise for Caudwell's work, saying,

I shall not attempt to criticise Illusion and Reality firstly because I am not competent to do so, and secondly because I agree with it. Nor shall I summarize it, because a summary always reads like a strict generalisation, and this book requires to be carefully read in its entirety to appreciate the force and depth of Mr. Caudwell's argument.

This is the most important book on poetry since the books of Dr. Richards, and, in my opinion, provides a more satisfactory answer to many problems which poetry raises.¹⁴⁸

This is the way most of the reviews went; for the most part, the significance of Caudwell's work depended upon the political perspective of the reviewer. Moreover, although

¹⁴⁷H. A. Mason, "The Illusion of Cogency," Scrutiny, 6, No. 4 (March 1938), pp. 429, 432-33.

¹⁴⁸W. H. Auden, rev. of Illusion and Reality, New Verse, 24 (February-March, 1937), p. 22.

there was a revival of interest in Caudwell's writings in the late Forties and early Fifties among Marxists and non-Marxists alike, as yet there has appeared no full-scale, scholarly treatment of his work. As a consequence, Caudwell's reputation remains "insecure." By the same token, it is not possible in this paper to provide the much-needed analysis. The following section will focus only on those particular points which seem to me to raise important methodological and theoretical questions not only for an understanding of Caudwell's work but for the relevance of the Marxist approach to literary analysis.

One of the things which disturbs critics when they read Illusion and Reality is the quality of the writing. Even critics who are sympathetic with Caudwell's point of view agree that his writing suffers from a lack of organization, systematic development, and clarity. The writing, as Margolies argues, is "dreadful." Part of the blame must fall on Caudwell's own lack of discipline and the haste with which he wrote. For example, between 1932 and 1937 (the year he was killed) Caudwell wrote seven detective novels, five works on aviation, a "serious novel" (This is My Hand), a book of poems, Studies and Further Studies in a Dying Culture, The Crisis in Physics, Illusion and Reality as well as a large quantity of unpublished manuscripts (e.g., Romance and Realism).¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁹ Cf. Hynes, p. 8. Studies, Further Studies, and The Crisis in Physics were published posthumously. Besides

However, this lack of clarity in Caudwell's writings is only partially explained by the haste with which he composed; this could have been corrected with a good editor. The major difficulties stem from Caudwell's use of a vocabulary drawn from the natural and biological sciences to discuss art. Poetry, for example, is "secreted in the web of society"; emotions are "fluid," and must be directed into "economic channels." Poetry "reflects" this or has "rational congruence" with that. Emotions "adhere to bits of reality." Art and science are two "vast spheres of light." Usually it is clear from the context what Caudwell means. Often, however, the metaphors seem inappropriate and confusing. Caudwell's worst offenses occur when he employs terminology drawn from psychology and psychoanalysis; the following should serve as an example:

We regard the phantastic device of art as similar in its general mechanism to the introverted distortion of schizophrenia and psychasthenic neurosis, and the phantastic device of science as similar in its general mechanism to the extraverted distortion of cyclothymia and hysteria.¹⁵⁰

It is not simply a quibble over whether one word sounds "better" than another. On the contrary, Caudwell's

Illusion and Reality, only This My Hand was published under the pseudonym "Christopher Caudwell"; the rest were published under his real name, Christopher St. John Sprigg.

¹⁵⁰ Illusion and Reality, p. 225.

metaphors and his images are his theory. In what sense can art be considered a "general mechanism"? If poetry is "heightened language," then what is the point of speaking of it in mechanistic images? How can poetry be "secreted"? A spider may "secrete" a web, but that is an instinctive, unconscious act. This image raises many of the same problems as raised by Eliot's metaphor of the poet's mind as a "shred of platinum"; it denies the importance of the poet as creative agent. How do emotions, which can be known only as they are expressed in some symbolic form, "adhere to bits of reality"? In what way do they "adhere" and what is a "bit" of reality?

Caudwell's explanation of consciousness, emotions, reality, art, etc. raise many of the same questions that Freud's explanations of similar phenomena do. If consciousness is essentially neurological, the result of mechanical motion, in what way can it be said to depend on language? If the Id, Ego, and Superego are based on mechanical models of mentation, how do they function in the Oedipus complex? That is to say if structure is mechanical, how does it function (or how is it described) in a dramatic model derived from linguistic data? If it is true, as Caudwell says, that "language expresses not merely what reality is . . . it expresses what can be done with reality--its inner hidden laws and what man wants to do with it--" then what is the point of saying that

language is a "reflection" or "picture" of reality?
Reflection is an image drawn from physics, i.e., the behavior of light; in what ways do linguistic acts correspond to the motion of light waves?

The problem of "reflection" is relevant not only to Caudwell but to Marxism as a whole. Even if one assumes that the universe is essentially determined by the transformations of matter in motion, still time and space must be symbolized in spatial and temporal imagery, and what images one uses determines how one can think about the universe. If one's view of reality is based on a mechanical model, its structure described with imagery drawn from the physical and biological sciences, how can one relate this structure and its function to the symbolic universe of art? If "consciousness streams on with different contents," and the "conscious field" consists of "protopathic visceral circuits, a mediating thalamic circuit, and an epicritic cortical circuit,"¹⁵¹ what is the function of language? If this is what consciousness consists of, then how can art function to expand it? Marx and Engels themselves are quite careful in their discussion of consciousness. Consciousness is "directly interwoven with material activity," in man's interaction with nature, but "language is as old as consciousness, language

¹⁵¹Caudwell, Further Studies, pp. 200-01.

is practical consciousness."¹⁵² One does not exist without the other. Other Marxists have been less careful with the term and are often content to assume that language and art are merely "reflections" of some "deeper" or "higher reality."

Caudwell's thought is profoundly influenced by the findings of neurology, psychology, and psychoanalysis. Further, of those whose thinking he attempts to synthesize with Marxism, none is more important than Freud. The relationship is complex, but one can say that almost all of Caudwell's work can be considered as much a critique of Freudianism (and those who were influenced by Freud) as an explanation of Marxism. It is from these studies that Caudwell derives his concepts of the primitive, inborn instincts and the "genotype"; and it is based on these notions that Caudwell conceives of the idea that the function of art is the adaptation of the instincts to "inner" and "outer" necessity. Caudwell admits that the formulation of "instinct" and "genotype" is a purely mental construct, a "purely fictive conception but methodologically useful."¹⁵³ At the same time, however, the method one adopts will determine the kinds of answers one is able to

¹⁵² Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, The German Ideology, pp. 14, 19.

¹⁵³ Further Studies, p. 196.

receive, and, as interesting as these constructs may be, Caudwell's reliance on them presents some problems. For one thing, although the genotype is composed of genes which produce individual differences, the genotype itself has an "unchanging core" which is a "complex of instincts" and which constitutes the natural, unadapted, unconscious "brute" animal--unsocialized man. These instincts are "timeless . . . the unchanging secret face of the genotype which persists beneath all the rich structure of civilization."¹⁵⁴ But does not Caudwell argue that reality is nothing but change, becoming, and development? How can the instincts be exempt from this process? If they are "timeless," then they are, by his own definition, unreal and if they are unreal, then what can they explain about the nature of reality? Caudwell is positing an "essence" for man which is exempt from historical development. Now, this may or may not be so, but its assertion is certainly contrary to Marxism. It is Feuerbach's maintaining of this proposition which drew Marx's criticism. Marx claimed that "Feuerbach resolves the religious essence into the human essence. But the human essence is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of the social relations."¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁴ Illusion and Reality, p. 203.

¹⁵⁵ Karl Marx, "Theses on Feurebach," Basic Writings, p. 244.

There have been numerous attempts to synthesize Marxian and various psycho-analytic world-views (e.g., in the works of R. D. Laing, Wilhelm Reich, Herbert Marcuse, Erich Fromm, and the existential psychoanalysis of Merleau-Ponty and Sartre), but as yet none have proven entirely successful. Where psychoanalysis has proven most helpful to Marxism is in its examination of the psychological dimensions of alienation (i.e., repression, self-abasement, internalization of authority, etc.). However, for the most part, the two world-views are incompatible. They begin with dialectically opposed views on the nature of man, and as yet no one has been able to synthesize them into a consistent "higher" third.

Moreover, Caudwell does not need a conception of "timeless" instincts in order to support his functional view of literature. One need not explain the known by the unknown. Using the example of the tribal harvest, Caudwell claims that the function of poetry is to "harness man's instincts," to "collect his emotions," in order that the individual may be spurred into work. The aim is directed social action. The problem, as Caudwell sees it, lies in the necessity of channeling emotional energy into the right praxis. One objection to this theory is that Caudwell assumes that the emotions "exist" before they are expressed in poetry; all poetry does is "channel" them into economic production. However, poetry is one of the

symbolic means through which man develops emotional phases of experience. Poetry does not teach one how to feel shame or to know fear, or to feel desire but how to transform the crude quality of such feeling into conscious emotion. This is accomplished through language, since on whatever level of experience emotions belong, they cannot be felt without being expressed. The emotions do not exist prior to the poetry, they are created in the poetic expression. As one critic argues, "We cannot know of another's emotions until we observe the manner in which the emotion is presented to us. Only as these emotions are expressed through some symbol system do they become communicable and hence social. And, in turn, only because others have given lasting forms in the various arts to the expression of emotions arising out of social experience can we develop conscious emotions."¹⁵⁶

Further, why is it necessary to refer to the instincts at all? Caudwell says, "We should not consider an animal as possessing instincts but only potential instincts, just as the cortex as a whole is not conscious but only potentially conscious. We should regard instinct only as it appears in behavior, as a response to some situation."¹⁵⁷ If instinct only appears in behavior,

¹⁵⁶ Hugh Duncan, Language and Literature in Society, p. 13.

¹⁵⁷ Further Studies, p. 196.

why not concentrate on behavior, i.e., human action? It is known, for example, that except for reflex action, all action is goal-directed. In the symbolic phase of the act this goal functions as a future-to-be-realized; it directs the act and permeates all of its phases (beginning, middle, and end). One of the functions of literature is to depict these goals and surround them with images and metaphors that are socially significant, that draw their emotional and intellectual power from the consensually validated symbols which arise in social experience. By means of imagination in the symbolic phase of experience man can create images of the past, present, and future that will transform undifferentiated feelings into highly conscious emotion and, hence, into socially valuable acts. Further, action must take a certain form. If reality is change and development, as Caudwell claims, then action is by its very nature problematic. It is not simply that the tribe wants its members to work, collective action must take a specific form; they must work in a certain way; each must play his proper role. These forms of collective action, these roles are not inherited. If collective action is needed, individuals must not only be made to desire it, they must also know how to achieve it. In tribal society these forms of actions must be passed on orally from generation to generation; harvesting is not accomplished in any manner, it must be done

the right way. Tribal poetry structures the act and creates the motivation for turning a symbolic action into a practical action. It is Caudwell's failure to analyze the structure and function of praxis and to develop a theory of social action based on communication that accounts, in part, for his need to assume the existence of a genotype. It is not enough to say that man is a creature of praxis; Marxists must show what the nature of praxis is, its structure, its function and its historical development. In addition, if one believes that the function of literature is to "harness" man's instincts, to adapt him to reality ("necessity"), then it is not surprising that Caudwell often seems to view literature as an instrument of coercion. Just as Freud believes that the function of the Ego must be to "censor" and control the anarchical Id, Caudwell sees that the social function of literature is to control man's brute instincts and adapt him to social reality; the genotype, with its selfish egotism, is always on the brink of erupting and must be kept under control. Literature then becomes a mode of domination.

More importantly, it leads Caudwell to confuse the function of literature with that of magic. Magic, too, is an art; however, unlike literature, which explores the possibilities and meaning of human action, magic assumes the desirability of the goal and functions to inspire man to practical actions thought to be desirable by the group.

Its medium is the language of exhortation, boasting, cursing, etc. It gives man confidence in his ability to achieve his goals because it charges its symbols employed in achieving these goals with great power. Thus, Malinowski says, "The magic spell is phonetically different [from ordinary speech]. With very few exceptions it is always chanted in a characteristic sing-song. It is also contextually different, that is, the behavior of the magician and of those present is different."¹⁵⁸ Words have a mystical significance because man's mastery over reality develops side by side with the knowledge of how to use words. Magic has "exercised a profound positive function in organizing enterprise, in instilling hope and confidence in the individual."¹⁵⁹ The main function of magic, Malinowski argues, is "not merely in giving a public magician the prestige of an individual with supernatural powers, but in placing in his hands the technique of controlling work."¹⁶⁰

The conditions for successful magic are its success in relating to man's basic needs, e.g., sex, hunger, status, etc. Man does not have to be convinced of the value of food; his problem rests in understanding what he

¹⁵⁸ Malinowski, Coral Gardens, II, 224.

¹⁵⁹ Coral Gardens, II, 239.

¹⁶⁰ Coral Gardens, I, 457-58.

must do in order to satisfy his hunger, what spirits he must placate, what enemies he must destroy, what techniques he must employ. The point here is that in magic, the goals of the act are not questioned; the emphasis is on how not why. Literature (unless it is propaganda or advertising) does not merely tell us how to act; it explores the possibilities and meanings of human action. There is no irony in magic. The tribal poetry which Caudwell describes is, for the most part, magic. It is magic's function to adapt man to necessity; it is literature's function to aid man in understanding the meaning of necessity.

And this is the crux of the problem. Indeed it is intimately related to Caudwell (as well as Marx and Engels) and his belief that "freedom is the recognition of necessity." Most Marxists would read the phrase putting the emphasis on "necessity"; however, it seems to me that the emphasis should fall on "recognition." Caudwell asserts that "what reality is stares man in the face."¹⁶¹ If this is true, then the "essence" of man is his myopia. Man does not confront "reality" face to face; he stares at it through a terministic fog, a forest of symbols. And man does not act on "reality" but on the "meaning" of reality. Recognition implies interpretation. This is

¹⁶¹Illusion and Reality, p. 196.

not to deny existence apart from reflection and interpretation. The question is not whether necessity exists but what it means. Further, meaning is social and arises in communication. Herbert Blumer writes,

. . . human beings act towards things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them. Such things include everything that the human being may note in his world--physical objects, such as trees or chairs; other human beings, such as a mother or a store clerk; categories of human beings, such as friends or enemies; institutions, as a school or government; guiding ideals, such as individual independence or honesty; activities of others, such as their commands or requests; and such situations as an individual encounters in everyday life, . . . the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows. . . . these meanings are handled in, and modified through an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters.¹⁶²

Man's definition of his situation may be in error; it may not correspond to "objective reality," but he acts on his interpretation of reality not on reality itself.

Benjamin Lee Whorf speculated that man defines reality through language; man is separated from "reality" by an instrument of his own making--language. Thomas Kuhn argues that all science takes place in the context of a ruling paradigm (read metaphor).¹⁶³ Stephen Pepper in his

¹⁶²Herbert Blumer, Symbolic Interpretation: Perspective and Method (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1969), p. 2.

¹⁶³Cf. Thomas S. Kuhn, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1962).

World Hypotheses analyzes the role of "root-metaphor" and man's perception of the world.¹⁶⁴ Philosophers, scientists, sociologists, and artists all have formulas defining the general nature of man and "necessity"; however, whatever their differences, they can all be grouped together in one crucial respect; they all function through the use of symbol systems, and, consequently, in their different modes display the resources and limitations of symbol systems. Freedom consists not so much in the "recognition of necessity"; it consists, as Alfred North Whitehead explains, "first in the maintenance of the symbolic code; and secondly, in fearlessness of revision, to secure that the code serves those purposes which satisfy reason. Those societies which cannot combine reverence to their symbols with freedom of revision, must ultimately decay either from anarchy, or from the slow atrophy of a life stifled by useless shadows."¹⁶⁵

Caudwell's failure and the failure of Marxism generally to develop a sociological theory of communication based on the social function of symbols constitutes the most obvious difficulty in creating a comprehensive theory

¹⁶⁴Cf. Stephen Pepper, World Hypothesis: A Study in Evidence (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1961).

¹⁶⁵Alfred North Whitehead, Symbolism: Its Meaning and Effect (1927 rpt. New York: Macmillan, 1958), p. 88.

of the social function of art from a Marxist perspective. At the same time, it poses a serious methodological problem; unless Marxism can develop a method for dealing with symbolic data as symbols, it is unlikely that it will have much future relevance for literary critics. In the final section of this study, I will suggest some possibilities for developing such a method.

CHAPTER VI

HISTORICAL PROBLEMS INVOLVED IN DEVELOPING A GENETIC-FUNCTIONAL MARXIST CRITICISM: TOWARD A MARRIAGE OF SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM AND MARXISM

In an autobiographical sketch written for the second edition of Illusion and Reality, George Thomson observes, "It is the first comprehensive attempt to work out a Marxist theory of art, and while some parts of the argument will doubtless be modified by further research, it is as a whole a permanent contribution to the subject, destined to become a classic."¹ Unfortunately, while it is true that Illusion and Reality has become a "classic," no further attempts have been made to criticize and elaborate on Caudwell's theory of the social function of art. Perhaps this curious neglect is symptomatic of the modern critic's loss of faith in the importance of art itself. This pessimistic view is expressed today in the writings of some of the best Marxist aestheticians and critics as well as in the works of non-Marxists. For example, Ernst Fischer, one of the most eminent of the

¹Cited in George Thomson, "In Defense of Poetry," Modern Quarterly, 6, No. 2 (Spring 1951), 108.

Marxist humanists, writes,

The impotence of art is evident, its power is smaller than ever. But was it ever a power? Was it a power as art or only in alliance with magic and religion--forces outside the aesthetic sphere. Art has rarely been capable of participating directly in social change--and then only when an old order has begun to crumble and the new, not yet clearly emerged, still has need of language, with its images, parables and symbols, in order to castigate that which is worthy of death and to announce and anticipate the future.²

The statement is all the more interesting coming as it does from a man who has been persecuted for his ideas about art and who has been witness to the Soviet repression and relentless persecution of writers who refuse to submit to dogma. One is tempted to ask, if art is "impotent," why are artists still being put in jail and insane asylums? Someone certainly believes that art has the power to create change.

I believe that the reluctance of critics to deal with the social function of art and literature is rooted in something more complex than simply the attitude that art may be irrelevant. The problem stems from what is involved in the concept of "social function," particularly as it relates to the development of modern literary criticism in England. At the beginning of the discussion of Caudwell's theory of art, it was noted that functionalism has its origins in classical sociology and anthropology. (Indeed in Durkheim's work, the sociological--Suicide--

²Ernst Fischer, Art Against Ideology, p. 217.

and the anthropological--Elementary Forms of Religious Life--were practically one.) Further, it was argued that the basic premise of functionalism is that all of the different elements of society--economics, politics, religion, science, art, etc.--are part of a consistent whole, integrated by the interconnecting functions of each element. Now, in order to understand the function of any one element, it is necessary to have a theory about society's total structure: functionalism assumes a totality. The development of theories and methods to comprehend the social system in its totality was the task of classical sociology, the sociology of men such as Durkheim, Weber, Pareto, and, more recently, Talcott Parsons. It developed in part, as a response to Marxism, which also attempts to see society and its historical development as a part of a whole. In one sense, it provided alternative interpretations to account for the social upheavals which were tearing European society apart.

However, if one turns to English intellectual history, he notices an interesting fact: with all of its contributions to Western culture, Britain has produced no significant sociology. England has produced no one of the stature of Durkheim, Weber, Pareto, or Parsons. Perhaps Herbert Spencer could be considered a forerunner, but among contemporary social theorists (i.e., from about 1890 onward), the English have produced practically no one.

In fact, until quite recently Oxford and Cambridge had no chair in sociology. Classical sociology, which, through its synthesis of politics, economics, religion, law, etc., was able to develop a theory of society as a unity, never found a home in England.

The whole concept of "totality" and the idea of a social "system" is alien to the British empirical tradition. The revolutionary movements in Europe forced its intellectuals to call the nature of society into question; in England, however, the bourgeoisie aligned themselves with the agrarian aristocracy from the beginning. As Norman Birnbaum explains, "British history is remarkable in the continuity of its elite structure. . . . the self-conscious and anti-aristocratic ideology and culture of the European bourgeoisie was simply missing in the United Kingdom."³ In addition, with the demise of the Chartist movement the danger of socialism--to which classical sociology is in large part a response--ceased to be a serious threat; hence, the bourgeoisie had no need or desire to call into question the whole social system. From the middle of the eighteenth century onward, the bourgeoisie adopted the cultural heritage of the upper class--a mixture of conservatism and empiricism--and made it their own. There were few intellectuals from the working class

³Norman Birnbaum, The Crisis of Industrial Society, pp. 17, 19.

to challenge this world-view; indeed, by the end of the nineteenth century there was no separate intelligensia which could be distinguished from Britain's ruling class. Further, from Edwardian times until the present, England has experienced no invasions or revolutions and, more importantly, no fundamental changes in her institutional structure. In the face of world chaos, she has managed to maintain her isolation and provinciality.

By its very nature, empiricism is hostile to all-encompassing "systems," and metaphysics in general. In addition, it has a pronounced ahistorical character. The essence of this philosophy, as it was formulated by Bacon, Locke, and Hume, is that perception is the source and ultimate test of all knowledge; consequently, its development is closely linked to the development of the natural sciences. Empiricism is the contribution of the English to philosophy. And, empiricism is congenial to the views of the world which arose out of what I have termed the "crisis in epistemology," particularly to the views of analytic philosophy. It is not surprising that many of the names associated with the "crisis" are English, or that those Continental intellectuals who are associated with it-- those who fled from revolution, Fascism, and war--found such a comfortable place in England: for example, Wittgenstein (philosophy); Popper (social theory); Isaiah Berlin (political theory); Ernst Gombrich (aesthetics);

Hans-Jurgen Eysenck (psychology); Melanie Klein (psycho-analysis); and Lewis Namier (history).

The influence of these emigrants was tremendous. As one cultural historian argues, "British empiricism and conservatism was on the whole an instinctive, ad hoc affair. It shunned theory even in its rejection of theory. It was a style, not a method. The expatriate impact on this cultural syndrome was paradoxical. In effect, the emigrés for the first time systematized the refusal of system. They codified the slovenly empiricism of the past, and thereby hardened and narrowed it."⁴ Their prominence in British cultural life is undisputed; Namier, Popper, and Berlin have all been knighted. (By contrast, two other emigrés, Isaac Deutscher, perhaps one of the greatest Marxist historians of the twentieth century, and Frederick Antal, one of the best Marxist art historians, were unable to obtain university posts.) In terms of social theory, ideology and historicism were pronounced dead.

In one field only--anthropology--was functionalism able to gain a foothold, and the work of Malinowski, Radcliffe-Brown, Evans-Pritchard, and Edmund Leach testifies to the remarkable power of functionalism as a

⁴Perry Anderson, "Components of the National Culture," p. 233. Much of the preceding discussion is indebted to Mr. Anderson's article. See also Alvin Gouldner, The Coming Crisis of Western Sociology, pp. 125-34.

methodological approach. By the same token, these scholars were not examining British society; their interest was confined to the social totalities of primitive tribal structures. Moreover, much of the knowledge they gained was put in the service of building Britain's colonial empire. As one anthropologist explains,

British social anthropology has drawn on the same intellectual capital as sociology proper, and its success, useful to colonial administration and dangerous to no domestic prejudice, shows at what a high rate of interest that capital can be made to pay. . . . The subject . . . unlike sociology, has prestige. It is associated with colonial administration--traditionally a career for a gentleman, and entrance into the profession and acceptance by it confers high status in Britain.⁵

At the same time, in its beginnings, functional theory had not distinguished between consequences which were clearly identified and intended (i.e., manifest functions) and consequences which were not intended or recognized (latent function).⁶ Nor did it have much to say about dysfunction, i.e., the nature and consequences of stress, strain, and tension on the structural level (e.g., class conflict); this was a consequence, in part, of their rather static model (usually an equilibrium model) which did not take into account historical change. Thus, they were often

⁵From Ideology and Society: Papers in Sociology and Politics (London, 1961), pp. 36, 9, cited in Anderson, p. 265.

⁶Cf. R. K. Merton, Social Theory and Social Structure (1957).

blind to unstable, dynamic societies which were in imperfect equilibrium. In short, they had a difficult time understanding social conflict, and social change. If, however, functionalism can be combined with a theory of history, as it was with Caudwell, it is a very powerful explanatory tool.

What does this have to do with literary criticism? Before a man can act as a critic, he must first be a social being; there can be no criticism without a social background. Further, every society moves forward on certain tacit assumptions that, for a time, remain unchallenged. These assumptions are deeply embedded in the outlook of the men and women who carry on society's activities. Any critical theory must necessarily be a specialized development of the general social view, and it is from such a view that the critic tends to arrange his categories and theories, in terms of the arrangements he unconsciously applies to social life. The practice of literary criticism is directed and interpreted in terms of these images and concepts which are fundamentally social in origin and represent an aspect of the prevailing ideology (even though criticism's findings may eventually undercut some of these unquestioned assumptions). The prevailing "ideology" was and is empiricism, and the major part of modern British critical activity has been and is operating within a cultural heritage that is empirical, ahistorical, and socially

nonfunctional (i.e., not concerned with the function of literature in society as a whole). A brief examination of the criticism of Eliot, Richards, and Leavis will illustrate the point.

In "Tradition and the Individual Talent," Eliot claims that a poet must have a "historical sense," but it is a strange sense that denies historical time. The poet must see the past as "timeless" and "temporal" while poetry exists as a "simultaneous order." Moreover, since poets do not express themselves but escape from themselves ("an escape from personality"), then historical methods are invalid for the critic because they invite an examination of the poet and his historical context when it is the poem he should consider. (In practice, Eliot was often "guilty" of violating his own prescriptions.) In addition, poetry can have no vital social function (as, say, religion) because Eliot does not consider poetry to be communication, or, if it is communication, it exists on some plane between the writer and the reader. The same may be said of criticism; criticism is for poets, and Eliot admits that his criticism is intended for his own benefit, to aid him in writing poetry. In terms of any larger social function, Eliot believes criticism to be generally useless (e.g., his own contempt for his The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism).

I. A. Richards has less use for the past than Eliot. In the first chapter of Principles of Literary Criticism, entitled "The Chaos of Critical Theories," he dismisses all of the criticism up to the present. His method of judging poems is to regard them as autonomous, cultural artifacts. In Practical Criticism, he gives his students poems that have been torn from their historical context (no author, no date) and then deplores the illiteracy of his students for not coming up with the correct meaning, evidently denying that poetry is created in a historical situation which to a substantial degree determines its meaning and significance. (Could it be that an unhistorical reading is bound to achieve questionable results?) However, he does see art as functional. Art organizes the reader's impulses, which in turn aid the individual in functioning better. Poetry creates attitudes which help the reader deal with reality. But, as Margolies observes, "Richards, as materialist as he is, is not social. He does not see the social determination of the attitudes or situations he discusses . . . his view of function is also non-social; he sees art as functional only in terms of the individual, improving the adjustment of separate individuals, but not in terms of society."⁷

⁷Margolies, The Function of Literature, p. 28.

F. R. Leavis, an early disciple of Eliot (e.g., New Bearings in English Poetry, 1932) is a more complex figure, and because of his militant anti-Marxist stand, he is, for the purposes of this study, more interesting. Despite the frequent inclusion of Leavis in the school of verbal analysis and association of him with the New Criticism, he is a moralist first. He uses the novel or poem as an occasion to say what he feels he must say about culture, and, like Lawrence, whom he admires, he is full of passionate conviction. In his studies of the novel, Leavis seeks to establish "the great tradition," based not on historical principles but on the quality and seriousness of the novel's moral concern. The critic's task, from Leavis' point of view, is to defend values by placing the artist and his work in a hierarchy of excellence. The viability of Leavis' whole system depends on a shared community of values between the poet, the critic, and the reader. If the reader's perspective is different from the critic's--and the division of labor and the specialization of modern culture makes this almost inevitable--then the entire enterprise is called into question. Leavis is aware that there is a divergence, and he blames it on industrialism and the mass media. Industrialism and mass communications have so degraded culture that his audience has shrunk to a small minority of sensitive, highly literate readers. Leavis longs for the "organic community" of the past,

uncorrupted by modern civilization, where there is no division between high and low culture.

For those who are able to appreciate it, the social function of literature is to communicate values. These values Leavis variously calls "healthy," "vital," and "life," the latter term being the most significant word in his critical vocabulary. He believes these values will be communicated through a close reading of great literature; at least Leavis finds them there. However, the paradox of Leavis' method is that he refuses to discuss the criteria by which it operates. In a letter to Leavis, René Wellek calls on Leavis to state his assumptions openly and defend them systematically. Wellek declares that he is in sympathy with Leavis' viewpoint but adds,

. . . I would have misgivings in pronouncing them without elaborating a specific defense or theory in their defense. . . . I would ask you to defend this position more abstractly and to become conscious that large ethical, philosophical, and, of course, ultimately also aesthetic choices are involved.⁸

Leavis refuses. In The Common Pursuit (1952), he refers the reader to Eliot's essay, "The Function of Criticism" (1923). Eliot says,

The critic, one would suppose, if he is to justify his existence, should endeavour to discipline his personal prejudices and cranks--tares to which we

⁸René Wellek, "Literary Criticism and Philosophy," Scrutiny (March, 1937), cited in Anderson, p. 270.

all are subject--and compose his differences with as many of his fellows as possible, in the common pursuit of true judgment.⁹

The method, however, by which "true judgment" can be determined is never disclosed, and certainly Leavis seldom attempts to "discipline his personal prejudices and cranks."

Marxism was one method that might have given him insight into the social totality and explained the phenomena of mass culture. It also could have given him a specific methodology and criteria for judging values. But Leavis would have none of it. In his "Retrospect of a Decade (1940)," Leavis declares that he and the writers for Scrutiny were unequivocally anti-Marxist. In another essay, he says candidly, "We were of course empirical and opportunist in spirit." He continues,

Marxist fashion gave us the doctrinal challenge. But Marxism was a characteristic product of our "capitalist" civilization, and the economic determinism we were committed to refuting practically was that which might seem to have been demonstrated by the movement and process of this. The dialectic against which we had to vindicate literature and humane culture was that of the external or material civilization we lived in. "External" and "material" here need not be defined: they convey well enough the insistence that our total civilization is a very complex thing, with a kind of complexity to which Marxist categories are not adequate.

Cambridge, then, figured for us civilization's anti-Marxist recognition of its own nature and needs--recognition of that, the essential, which Marxian wisdom discredited, and the external and

⁹T. S. Eliot, "The Function of Criticism," in Selected Prose, ed. John Hayward (Middlesex: Penguin, 1953), p. 18.

material drive of civilization threatened, undoc-
trinally, to eliminate.¹⁰

Thus, the best of culture becomes idealized and represented by Cambridge; it is here that Leavis takes refuge. It is in Cambridge that culture will flourish in opposition to the rest of civilization. One wonders how he would have replied to Eliot's assertion that "the culture of the individual cannot be isolated from that of the group, and that the culture of the group cannot be abstracted from that of the whole society. . . . Nor does it follow that in a society, of whatever grade or culture, the groups concerned with each activity of culture will be distinct and exclusive: on the contrary, it is only by an overlapping and sharing of interests, by participation and mutual appreciation, that the cohesion necessary for culture can obtain."¹¹

My object in discussing these critics is to examine the assumptions that modern British criticism was and still is working under. Eliot and Richards argue for an empirical, non-historical approach to literature, which is non-functional in terms of society as a whole. Leavis, who is by common assent the most influential British critic of the twentieth century, is empirical and non-historical

¹⁰F. R. Leavis, "'Scrutiny': A Retrospect," Scrutiny, 20 (rpt. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), 4.

¹¹T. S. Eliot, from Notes Towards the Definition of Culture in Selected Prose, p. 232.

in his method. He sees the function of literature as providing a defense against the encroachments of industrialism and mass culture. Although he refuses to elaborate the world-view on which he bases his method and criteria, he is militantly anti-Marxist. None of these critics has developed a theory of the social function of literature.

In addition to the reliance on empiricism, the traditional hostility to all-encompassing systems and the lack of a historical perspective, another element which contributed to the lack of development of a social theory of literature was Caudwell's own physical and social isolation. Many of the critics who have written on his achievement stress that his life "did not touch the lives of the smart literary Left," and that during the time he was writing Illusion and Reality, "his isolation in Cornwall was an appropriate gesture--to construct his own theory."¹² Somehow the achievement seems even more impressive because it was the work of a lone genius. Certainly, this argument has its merits; many of our greatest intellectual monuments have been the result of the work of one, isolated thinker. It is also true that if a man is going to write, sooner or later he must stop reading and talking and start writing. But by the same token, Caudwell's isolation prevented any cross-fertilization of ideas, and ideas, if they are to remain significant, must

¹²Hynes, pp. 7, 16.

be communicated. Further, Caudwell needed someone to read and criticize his work, someone who knew what he was trying to do and who could grasp some of the problems of the task. What I am trying to suggest is that his isolation hurt him as much as it helped him, and it prevented his ideas from having immediate impact on other critics. To illustrate my point: the same year that Caudwell began writing Illusion and Reality, William Empson published his Some Versions of the Pastoral (1935) and the same year that Caudwell's book was published, L. C. Knights published Drama and Society in the Age of Jonson (1937). While neither were Party members, nor were, in any sense, what one might call "revolutionary" activists, both made brilliant use of Marxism as a method of literary analysis. It is useless to speculate on what effect either of these critics might have had on Caudwell. At the same time, however, their works provide an interesting perspective on Caudwell's work. This is not to argue that Empson's or Knights' work is in any sense "better" than Caudwell's; each critic was attempting to solve different problems. On the other hand, they do raise issues that Caudwell failed to consider, and they point to areas in which his theory of social function might be developed.

For instance, one of the most discouraging features of most of Caudwell's work (and that of Marxists generally) is its abstractness and high level of generality.

When Caudwell is discussing the relationship between the base and the superstructure and the emergence of class art, the level of generalization is so high that it is difficult to anchor the concepts in concrete specifics. L. C. Knight raises this methodological problem at the beginning of his study. "When," he asks, "we discuss the relations between economic conditions and 'culture,' what, exactly, are we talking about?"¹³ Knight argues that Marxist assertions (regarding English literature at least) can be neither proven nor disproven, since they inevitably offer a description of the relationship of one abstraction to another:

. . . the subject, as usually formulated, is too large and general. It can only be discussed at all in relation to a particular place and time, and then it is seen to split up into a multitude of smaller problems, a bewildering complexity supervening upon the simplicity of the dialectical formulation. The first necessity is to narrow the field. If, for example, we ask ourselves how we should set about determining the relations between dramatic literature (leaving aside religion, lyric poetry, painting, pastimes . . .) and "the prevailing mode of economic production and exchange" in the Shakespearian period we are more likely to establish a few useful conclusions than if we continue to discuss the relation of one abstraction to another.¹⁴

Knight then proposes to examine plays which have more or less explicit social reference. In so doing, he does not

¹³L. C. Knight, Drama and Society in the Age of Jonson (London: Chatto and Windus, 1937), p. 1.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 5.

argue that the plays are "about" Elizabethan economic conditions, but that "the materials on which the dramatist's work is drawn . . .--[have] an immediate reference to--the movements, the significant figures of contemporary life; the satire on usurers, the profiteers and the newly rich, on social ambition and the greed for money." In addition, "The social interests that are drawn on are not those of one class alone," and Jonson, "in his handling of ambition, greed, lust, acquisitiveness and so on . . . implicitly, but clearly, refers to more than a personal scheme of values. Jonson in short was working in a tradition. What we have to determine is where that tradition 'came from.'"¹⁵

Knights divides his study into two general sections: "The Background" and "The Dramatists."¹⁶ He is obviously aware that the real test of any method in a

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 8, 10.

¹⁶ These are subdivided as follows: I. The Inherited Economic Order under Elizabeth II. The Development of Capitalist Enterprise--The Discoveries and the Development of Capitalism--Capitalist Finance--The Growth of a Money Market--Overseas Trade--The Development of Industry--Monopolies and Projects--The 'New Men'. . . . III. New Elements in the National Life--Enclosures and the Growth of a Land Market. Merchants Buying Land--The Dislocation of Social Classes and the Decay of 'House-keeping'--Luxury, and the Importance of Money--Poverty, Unemployment and Trade Depressions. IV. Social Theory. V. Drama and Society. VI. Tradition and Ben Jonson. VIII. Jonson and the Anti-Acquisitive Attitude. VIII. Dekker, Heywood and Citizen Morality. IX. Middleton and the New Social Classes. X. The Significance of Massinger's Social Comedies: With a Note on Decadence. Appendix A: Elizabethan Prose. Appendix B: Seventeenth Century Melancholy.

study dealing with society and literature is not how clear or how complete the discussion of the one element or the other is, but how well the relationship between the two elements is established. Knights' focus on the economic aspects of Jonson's London produces an understanding of what kinds of problems faced the masses and the classes of this period. The first 170 pages of his study are filled with concrete illustrations taken from the sermons, pamphlets, court records, diaries, family memoirs, letters, etc., of the many problems linked with the adjustment of an older, feudal set of social values with the emergent set of social values now known as capitalism. For the people of this period these problems were moral and individual problems; that is to say, there were no "systems" or "social forces" to be blamed. If a man took high interest, it was assumed that he made up his mind to do so, not that he was "caught" in the "profit system." Knights studiously avoids setting up abstractions about these problems until he has shown concretely what the particular problems are. He is not content to talk about an "anti-acquisitive attitude" in general, but is careful to show what the specific anti-acquisitive attitude of Jonson's public was. When he comes to discuss enclosures and the growth of a land market, merchants buying land, the dislocation of social classes and the decay of "housekeeping," luxury and the importance of money, poverty, unemployment

and trade depressions, he is careful to demonstrate in what way these affected the literary world of a particular time and place--Elizabethan London. Once these facts are established, Knights begins his examination of plays that "embody an attitude toward those facts."

Knights succeeds admirably in revealing how these attitudes surface in Jonson's drama. Attitudes toward money, as they are expressed by various characters, are shown not to be "inner" preoccupations of Jonson's unique personality but a statement of the common preoccupation of Jonson's audience about money in their own lives. Knights does not contend that Jonson as an individual contributes nothing to this, nor that there are not specific factors in the development of the theatrical art of the time which mark Jonson's plays. What he does point out is the degree to which Jonson's themes were those of his social group. It is not within my competence to judge Knights' contribution to Renaissance scholarship; however, his methodology demonstrates how fruitful a Marxist approach can be if its concepts are "filled-in" with concrete data. Further, although he does not attempt to develop a theory of the social function of literature, he does demonstrate how the individual and social conflicts of a period become the raw material for art and how the artist manages to articulate (and resolve) these conflicts, thereby communicating an attitude toward them.

Knights' strength is Caudwell's weakness. Caudwell is constantly generalizing on the basis of little or no data, and this leads him into making statements that are, at best, silly (e.g., Fascism is "incapable of creating any art at all").¹⁷ In addition, although he argues that form and content cannot be separated, he seldom discusses the function of form as content. His discussion of the function of tribal poetry is detailed enough, but when he comes to someone like Alexander Pope the most he can say is,

Pope's poetry, and its "reason"--a reason moving within singularly simple and shallow categories but moving accurately--with its polished language and metre and curt antithesis, is a reflection of that stage of the bourgeois illusion where freedom for the bourgeoisie can only be "limited"--man must be prudent in his demands, and yet there is no reason for despair, all goes well. Life is on the upgrade, but it is impossible to hurry. The imposition of outward forms on the heart is necessary and accepted. Hence, the contrast between the elegant corset of the eighteenth-century heroic couplet and the natural luxuriance of Elizabethan blank verse whose sprawl almost conceals the bony structure of the iambic rhythm inside it.¹⁸

Granting the admittedly schematic nature of Illusion and Reality and ignoring the value judgments, one must still insist that this is not enough. How does Pope's verse harness the instincts of man and make him conscious of inner necessity? How does it produce "physiological introversion"? In short how is the poem functioning?

¹⁷Caudwell, Romance and Realism, p. 88.

¹⁸Illusion and Reality, p. 86.

Caudwell was familiar with Empson's Seven Types of Ambiguity (1930) but evidently not with Some Versions of the Pastoral which is, as Stanley Edgar Hyman observes, "implicitly Marxist throughout."¹⁹ Basing his argument on the assumption that there will always be some form of class conflict (even in a socialist state, "an intelligensia at the capital" would feel more "cultivated than the farmers"), Empson investigates the social function of certain literary forms--pastoral, irony, subplot, parody--within this context. The essence of his method rests on his definition of the pastoral. For Empson, the pastoral is not a fixed mechanical form in which the writer puts his content: the form is the content. Form is distinguished by the attitude it conveys and the pastoral is essentially a form which communicates "irony and ambiguity" by the process of putting the complex into the simple."²⁰ It is the creation of "an artificial cult of simplicity" and the attitudes which are communicated by this act. Hence "a pastoral poem is then not a poem about shepherds, but a poem that acts like the old pastorals about shepherds."²¹

¹⁹Hyman, The Armed Vision, p. 283.

²⁰William Empson, Some Versions of the Pastoral (1935 rpt. New York: New Directions, 1960), p. 51.

²¹Hyman, p. 282.

Empson sees the pastoral working in all sorts of literature--proletarian literature, double plots in Renaissance drama, Shakespearean sonnets, Paradise Lost, The Beggar's Opera, Alice in Wonderland--and in each case discusses the social implications of use. Basically, the artificial simplicity and the irony which is generated has its roots in the old pastoral:

The essential trick of the old pastoral, which was felt to imply a beautiful relation between rich and poor, was to make simple people express strong feelings (felt as the most universal subject, something fundamentally true about everybody) in learned and fashionable language (so that you wrote about the best subject in the best way). From seeing the two sorts of people combined like this you thought better of both; the best parts were used. The effect in some degree to combine in the reader or author the merits of the two sorts; he was made to mirror in himself more completely the effective elements of the society he lived in.²²

Upon this form one can construct "straight" pastorals, "realistic" pastorals, "mock-pastorals," etc. Thus, the Worker in proletarian literature is a version of the "child-cult, which is a version of the pastoral" (artificial innocence, a "natural" man, an uncorrupted outsider viewing society at a distance, etc.), and proletarian literature is a type of "realistic" pastoral:

The realistic sort of pastoral . . . gives a natural expression for a sense of social justice. So far as the person described is outside society because too poor for its benefits he is independent, as the artist claims to be, and can be a critic of society; so far as he is forced by this

²²Empson, pp. 11-12.

into crime he is the judge of the society that judges him. This is a source of irony both against him and against the society, and if he is a sympathetic criminal he can be made to suggest both Christ as a scapegoat (so invoking Christian charity) and the sacrificial tragic hero, who is normally above society rather than below it, which is a further source of irony.²³

The irony and ambiguity which result from the resolution of real complex contradictions into an "ideal" simplicity can have the function of adjusting one to being ruled. "Critical" irony implies that the situation should be changed, but "comic" irony (Empson's "comic primness") implies that "the speaker does not feel strong enough, or much desire, perhaps for selfish reasons to stand up against them [unjust elements in the social order]; he shelters behind them and feels cosy."²⁴ Irony, mockery, and parody have important social functions, for as Empson says, "clearly, it is important for a nation with a strong class system to have an art-form that not merely evades but breaks through it, that makes the classes feel part of a larger unity or simply at home with each other."²⁵ The pastoral form is a "crucial literary" achievement; it functions "to reconcile some conflict between the parts of a society; literature is a social process, and also an attempt to reconcile the conflicts of an individual in

²³Ibid., p. 17.

²⁴Ibid., p. 201.

²⁵Ibid., p. 189.

whom those of society will be mirrored.²⁶

The significance of Empson's achievement rests on the way he illustrates how a specific literary form can have wide-ranging social consequences. Although he draws on Freud (especially in his essay "Alice in Wonderland: The Child as Swain"), he does not resort to any theory of instincts but shows how the literature is functioning as literature. Caudwell seldom reaches this point in his analysis. At the very least, Marx and Engels provide insights into the relationship between literature and power, that is to say, how literature is used by a group to attain power, sustain its power, destroy the power of others, dignify its position, degrade the position of others, create secular heavens (of the future or the past) and hells, in short, how groups use literature to organize symbolic experience. It is not enough to say that bourgeois art is "class art"; one must show how the bourgeois artist uses specific art and how those art forms perform a social function. To claim that the ruling class controls consciousness is not very helpful; the Marxist critic must show what specific forms this consciousness takes and how this form keeps the ruling class in power. In Versions of the Pastoral, Marxism and criticism come together in Empson's observation that irony may be a device

²⁶Ibid., p. 19.

for reconciling the domination of one class over another. Unfortunately for Marxist criticism, Empson did not continue to work in this area.

The relevance of Knights' and Empson's works to Caudwell's writings is obvious. However, working as he did in a relatively isolated context, the cross-fertilization never took place. Had he survived the Spanish Civil War, Caudwell probably would have elaborated on many of the concepts he only touched on in Illusion and Reality. As the work stands, it remains an undeveloped theory which lays the groundwork for further study. Yet the development was not forthcoming. Both in the United States and Great Britain Marxism was a casualty of the Cold War.

The Present Situation

The British New Left emerged from the crisis in British social and political life which was associated with the Suez crisis, the Hungarian revolution, the "thaw" in Soviet society, the intellectual's concern with the effects of psychological manipulation from the mass media, and the general feeling of alienation despite the "triumph" of the Welfare State. It was neo-Marxist in its perspective, and its two intellectual organs, The New Reasoner and the Universities and Left Review, were aimed at developing a socialist-humanist philosophy.²⁷ As one might

²⁷ That is to say, they were strongly influenced by the "reinterpretation" of Marx's thought which--as a result

expect, there was a renewed interest in using Marxian theory and method for the analysis of society, culture, and literature. The Universities and Left Review carried sociological criticism of the cinema and literature, with articles from prominent novelists, artists, and journalists. The New Reasoner published stories by Doris Lessing, poetry from Christopher Logue and Bertolt Brecht and art supplements on the work of William Blake and Diego Rivera (The Universities and Left Review and The New Reasoner merged into the New Left Review in December, 1959).

At this point in time, it is difficult and perhaps premature to attempt to determine the direction which this criticism is taking or its ultimate significance. There are a few critics, such as A. L. Morton and Arnold Kettle, who are "orthodox," in the sense that most of their ideas were formed in the critical debates of the Thirties. Kettle's An Introduction to the English Novel (Vol. I, 1951; Vol. II, 1953) draws on the works of Alick West, Christopher Caudwell, and, particularly, Ralph Fox's The Novel and the People, locating the writers and their work in a Marxian historical perspective and evaluating them in much the same manner as Leavis. One excellent literary

of increased attention to Marx's early Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts and to his rough draft, Grundrisse der Kritik der Politischen Oekonomie (Fundamental Traits of the Critique of Political Economy), published in 1953--which was being hotly debated on the Continent.

history, David Craig's Scottish Literature and the Scottish People, 1680-1830, and two fine biographies, Edward Thomson's biography of William Morris and Jack Lindsay's George Meredith: His Life and Work (1956) take a rather conservative Marxist approach to their subjects. Both Kettle and Lindsay acknowledge the influence of Georg Lukács, but it is hard to see where the influence lies; certainly neither Kettle nor Lindsay have Lukacs' theoretical insight or his breadth of vision. Taken as a whole, none of the recent Marxist criticism of this group indicates that there has been any advance on methodological problems.

Raymond Williams, whose two books, Culture and Society 1780-1950 (1958) and The Long Revolution (1961), were themselves significant in shaping the course of the British New Left, sums up the problem of developing a Marxist methodology:

What many of us have felt about Marxist cultural interpretation is that it seems committed, by Marx's formula, to a rigid methodology so that if one wishes to study, say, a national literature, one must begin with the economic history with which the literature co-exists, and then put the literature to it, to be interpreted in its own light. It is true that on occasion one learns something from this, but, in general, the procedure seems to involve both forcing and superficiality. For even if the economic element is determining, it determines a whole way of life, and it is this, rather than to the interpretative method which is governed, not by the social whole, but rather by the arbitrary correlation of the economic situation and the subject of study, leads very quickly to abstraction and unreality, . . . It leads also to the overriding of practical concrete judgements

by generalizations, It leads also, I think, to very doubtful descriptions of culture as a whole. To describe English life, thought and imagination in the last three hundred years as "bourgeois," to describe English culture now as "dying" is to surrender reality to a formula.²⁸

This seems to me eminently just. Williams does say that "this point is still controversial among Marxists"; however, the conclusions he draws seem justified, i.e., "a general inadequacy among Marxists in the use of 'culture' as a term." They use it to refer to "the intellectual and imaginative products of a society," rather than to indicate "a whole way of life, a general social process." Williams argues, "The point is not merely verbal, for the emphasis in this latter use would make impossible the mechanical procedures which I have criticized, and would offer a basis for a more substantial understanding."²⁹

Williams' suggestion, however, raises some problems. For one thing, when Marxists speak of cultural "products," they mean something quite specific. What they are saying is that art, literature, science, etc., have become "products"; in a capitalist society, culture has become a commodity. As Norman Birnbaum explains,

Culture no longer concretizes itself in individual relationships to nature and society, but in an enormous multiplicity of forms, processes, and entities which seem independent, detached from their origin in human activity. The significance of the very notion of a cultural product may now be somewhat more clear. It is a mode of discourse

²⁸ Raymond Williams, Culture and Society, pp. 281-82.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 282.

which accepts the fact of what I earlier termed the objectification of culture, a gap (indeed an abyss) between men and the meanings and mechanisms of a world they are not quite able to experience as theirs. The idea of a cultural product appears to have emerged precisely when men became incapable of engendering a new culture. The residual meaningfulness of work of individuals was lost in the senseless whole. A lack of meaning in work for many, at the same time, was transposed into meaning for society at a distance very remote from their lives.³⁰

Before the advent of industrialism, culture seemed unified; it was man-made; it was a "human" culture. Even with the division of labor and the consequent division between "high" and "low" culture, "the European elite was confident in the utilization of culture for its own social ends, a culture which it could comprehend, which had a definite boundary, which presented in principle no problems of opaqueness or inaccessibility. It was experienced as a means of mastery over the natural and historical environment rather than as a system which could or did escape understanding and control."³¹ However, during the industrialization of culture a system of symbols, forms of consciousness, modes of sensibility, conscious and unconscious meanings, are subsumed within the demands of machine processes, market structures, and bureaucratic organization:

The industrialization of culture entailed the gradual extirpation of Homo Faber. . . . mastery

³⁰ Birnbaum, The Crisis of Industrial Society, p. 133.

³¹ Ibid., pp. 109-10.

was expressed in techniques for the control of nature and mechanisms of social discipline which gradually assumed autonomous forces. Culture, in other words, was increasingly objectified. That objectification reflected the objectification of human labor power in the processes of machine production, and the abstraction of human social relationships in the impersonal forces of the market.

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 Aesthetic sensibility, religious feeling (above all, the belief in transcendence), the emotions between persons, sensuality itself, were transformed by the new industrial setting. The artisans and peasants lost forms which had regulated the rhythmical alternation of work and leisure; their communities, organized about that alternation, now became appendages of the factories. The most highly cultured of the bourgeoisie were excluded from the new processes of production. They sensed that their former world, with its consonance between work and culture, was gone. . . . A turn to inwardness, to feeling and imagination, and often enough to an idealized past or mythic future, was a consequence for the more sensitive, particularly for those who specialized in the transmission of culture, the intellectuals and the artists. The Romantic movement had many aspects, but in one of them it expressed this remoteness from the market and the machine.³²

Or, as William Morris argues, once man could no longer "express joy in his labour," once art and work became distinct activities, then art (and all culture) became a mere "product."

Williams' suggestion that culture should be thought of as "a whole way of life" also has its problems. It is vague and it does not take into account how culture functions. Concerning Williams' definition, E. P. Thompson offers some incisive criticism:

³²Ibid., pp. 128, 130.

. . . "life" is a "good" word, with associations of unconscious vitalism: life "flows," it is "ever-changing" in "flux," and so on--and so indeed it is. But I think it has flowed through chinks in Mr. Williams' reasoning into a pervasive euphoria of "expansion" and "new patterns." . . . I wish that he had remembered of "life," as . . . Marx insisted of "history":

History does nothing, it possesses no immense wealth, fights no battles. It is rather man, real living man who does everything, who possesses and fights."

And we might note a tentative definition from the archaeologist, Professor Grahame Clark:

Culture . . . may be defined as the measure of man's control over nature, a control exercised through man's experience among social groups and accumulated through the ages.³³

Thompson goes on to offer his own definition of culture that is based on "function: it raises the question of what culture does (or fails to do). Second, it introduces the notion of culture as an experience which has been 'handled' in specifically human ways, and so avoids the life equals way-of-life tautology." Thompson argues for a Marxist interpretation to distinguish culture from non-culture:

We must suppose the raw material of life--experience to be at one pole, and all the infinitely complex human disciplines and systems, articulate and inarticulate, formalised in institutions or dispersed in the least formal ways, which "handle" transmit, or distort this raw material to be at the other. . . . And if we were to alter one word in Mr. Williams' definition, from "way of life" to "way of growth," we move from a definition whose associations are passive and impersonal to one which raises questions of activity and agency. And if we change the word again, to delete the associations of "progress" which are implied in "growth," we might get: "the study of relationships between

³³E. P. Thompson, "The Long Revolution (Part I)," New Left Review, No. 9 (1960), p. 33.

elements in a whole way of conflict." And a way of conflict is a way of struggle. And we are back with Marx.³⁴

And we are back to the problem of functionalism. For Williams, the central problem of society is communication, which "begins in the struggle to learn and describe." He observes, "My own view is that we have been wrong in taking communication as secondary. Many people seem to assume as a matter of course that there is first, reality, and then, second, communication about it."³⁵ In his Long Revolution, Williams quotes the biologist J. Z. Young who asserts that the function of the artist and scientist are exactly the same: to articulate and communicate phenomena which were not communicated before. It is the search for modes of communication which develops our perception because perception must be learned. Williams says, "Everything we see and do, the whole structure of our relationship and institutions, depends, finally, on an effort of learning, description and communication."³⁶ And art perfects the forms by which one communicates. Few Marxists would disagree with this.

³⁴Thompson, loc. cit.

³⁵Raymond Williams, Britain in the Sixties: Communication (Baltimore, Maryland: Penguin, 1962), p. 11.

³⁶Raymond Williams, The Long Revolution, rev. ed. (1965 rpt. New York: Harper and Row, 1966), pp. 37-38.

However, Williams ignores the role of ideology in communication and art. He does not take into account the fact that communication can be a mode of domination, that all institutions seek to maximize their power, legitimize it, sustain it, through communication. Art can be used, as Hitler used it, to organize hate and dehumanize others. As Thompson argues,

. . . it is only when the systems of communication are replaced in the context of power-relationships that we see the problem as it is. And it is the problem of ideology. I think this is the crucial question which those who think like Mr. Williams and those in the Marxist tradition must find ways of discussing together. Mr. Williams gives glimpses of the problem; but he never considers how far a dominant social character plus a structure of feeling plus the direct intervention of power plus market forces and systems of promotion and reward plus institutions can make and constitute together a system of ideas and beliefs, a constellation of received ideas and orthodox attitudes, a "false consciousness" or a class ideology which is more than the sum of its parts and which has a logic of its own. He does not consider how, in a given cultural milieu, there may be an impression of openness over a wide area and yet still at certain critical points quite other factors--of power or of hysteria--come into play. . . . there must be a dialogue--about power, communication, class and ideology--of the kind which I have tried to open.³⁷

For Marxists, then, the problem still remains--to develop a sociological theory which will comprehend the social function of culture and, as a corollary, the social function of literature. This is the urgent task of the

³⁷ E. P. Thompson, "The Long Revolution (Part II)," New Left Review, No. 10 (1960), pp. 37-38.

present, for until we know what literature does we do not know what it is.

In the last section of this chapter, I am going to suggest some avenues of approach in thinking about the social function of literature. First, however, I think it necessary to "sum up" the major contributions of Marxism to British literary theory. In developing a theory of the social function of literature it is not necessary to start from scratch.

Summary: Key Concepts in
a Marxian Approach to Literature

Historicism. At a time when many of the major critics were moving away from the historical approach, Marxist critics were arguing for a dual mode of existence of the literary work, which implied a dual conception of literary meaning. A literary work actually has two meanings: one meaning is controlled by its historical context, and the other meaning is derived from the critic's concept of the function of the work in his own, present situation. Both concepts are based essentially on Marxism's dialectical approach to the problem of meaning. Moreover, it was not simply a matter of relating literature to its historical context. Marxism also provided a theory of history by which the "historical context" could be interpreted. In order to understand fully a literary work, the writer, the work, the audience, and

criticism itself must be seen as arising out of a specific historical situation which has a definite mode of existence, ultimately determined by the interaction between the productive forces and the relations of production (i.e., social relationships). The critic must view the work of art as the product of a dialectic between the artist and society. While other thinkers have developed alternative ways of thinking about society and historical development, no one has yet proven that their method is "better" than Marx's.

Concept of Unity. Marxist critics have been profoundly influenced by the concept of organicism which found its clearest expression in Romantic philosophy. Literature is not a totally autonomous, self-sufficient whole; it is related to the other institutions of society which, in turn, are related to man's material activity. As Caudwell said, all events are in "determining" relationships to each other. At the same time, this organic relationship is not stable; it changes and develops through its own "contradictions" (the dynamic quality of organicism which Marx took from Hegel) in a dialectical process. This is the "motor" of history. The same concept applies to literature; literary activity can be seen to arise in the contradiction between the individual and society, between personal experience and inherited "forms," between individual, "egotistical" activity and social

activity, between "use value" and "exchange value" (i.e., producing for a market), etc.

Work and Art. In contrast to those who see the artist as "inspired," "mad," "neurotic," etc., Marxist critics tend to demystify the artist and the creative act. The artist is no different from any other normal human being; his special status is the result of the increasing division of labor within society. Moreover, Marxists define art in broad, general terms which focus on art as an "act" rather than a "thing," and, in certain instances, art and work become one and the same. Any action is creative and aesthetic when it is not entirely instrumental but enjoyed for itself, when the "ends" of labor permeate the "means" of labor. When work is considered not merely as a means of satisfaction but satisfying in itself, work becomes aesthetic. In capitalist society, work has simply become a means to an end (money); man is alienated in his labor (and so in all of his relationships) because work has lost its aesthetic quality. Literature becomes a "thing," a "product," a "commodity," which disguises its social relations and becomes merely another item to be sold on the open market. To unite work and art once again, thereby making all praxis aesthetic, is the heart of the Marxian "revolutionary idea." Art is the paradigm for judging social relationships.

Art as a "Reflection" of Reality. Marxists contend that art mirrors the society which produces it. To say that literature "reflects" reality simply means that a specific type of society produces a specific type of literature and influences its form and content. The writer cannot stand outside his society; his world-view is determined, to a large extent, by his social relationships. For his art to have any meaning for his audience, it must deal with the problems of that society. If that society is a class society, then its art will be class art (as will be all of its culture). Again, however, there may be a "contradiction." In the case of great writers (Aeschylus, Shakespeare, Balzac, Goethe) there may be an element of "dissociation"; the writer sees beyond the limited horizon of his class and communicates the "truth" about reality often in spite of his own personal views (perhaps even unconsciously); the writer may not even recognize the "objective" significance of his own works. The possibilities of this happening depend upon the extent to which the writer succeeds in preserving his own freedom and the integrity of the artistic activity itself.

Marxism as a "Critical" Perspective. Because it is an all-encompassing world-view, Marxism (like religion) offers a rather unique perspective on a contemporary fragmented culture. It should not be forgotten that Marxism is based on a "critical" perspective; even Capital is

subtitled "A Critique of Political Economy." In terms of the methodology of literary analysis, Marxists have been able to offer trenchant criticisms of other methodologies, e.g., traditional historicism, Freudianism, archetypal criticism, formalism, existentialism and recently, structuralism. Similarly, they have tried to utilize the "best" elements and methods of each school by attempting to assimilate them into a Marxist perspective. Because it is a world-view and a method, Marxists have been able to argue from first principles; that is to say, they can ground their assumptions, methods, and theories in a consistent philosophical position. Indeed, Georg Lukács claims that Marxism is basically a method and that any question of "orthodoxy" refers exclusively to method" (dialectical materialism).³⁸

Concept of Social Function. Implicit in the or "organicism" is the idea that each part functions as part of the whole and that any change in the one part affects the whole as any change in the whole affects all of the parts. Marxists, of course, were not the first to focus on the social function of art; both Plato and Aristotle were well aware of the effect art could have on a society. But Marxists were among the first to conceive of culture as an ideology (i.e., a pattern of beliefs

³⁸George Lukács, History and Class Consciousness, p. 1.

and concepts, both factual and normative which purport to explain complex social phenomena for the purpose of directing and simplifying socio-political choices confronting individuals and groups). They spoke of the way in which art, including literature, was used in the struggle for power among classes. Among Marxists, Caudwell has given this concept its clearest articulation to date.

A Contribution to the Analysis of the
Social Function of Literature:
The Work of Kenneth Burke and Hugh Duncan

It has been one of the main contentions throughout this study that although Marxist critics have moved toward developing a theory of the social function of literature, their task has been difficult because neither Marx nor Engels concern themselves with investigating the specific social functions of symbols. They focus on the "reality" "behind" symbols but seldom concentrate on the function of symbols themselves or how symbols do what they say they do. Hence it has been difficult for most Marxists to discuss symbolic structures and forms because they have developed few methods for understanding the function of symbols, for example, the way in which literature works in human relationships. If one assumes that form follows function, then it is essential that one understand the function symbols as symbols in order to explain the formal characteristics of a work of art.

The final section of this study examines the work of two men--Kenneth Burke and Hugh Duncan--both of whom have developed methods and theories for understanding the social function of symbols and, particularly, the social function of literature. Burke and Duncan believe that the specific social function of literature is the creation of social order through the communication of hierarchy. Burke argues that all hierarchies are linguistic constructs and that by analyzing the internal structure of the artist's symbolic act--the structure and movement of his "image clusters"--one can determine how the writer is "sizing up" this hierarchy and what his "strategy" is for coming to terms with his "hierarchic psychosis" (acceptance, rejection, doubt, etc.) in the dramatic structure of his work. Symbols provide man with an orientation, a formula for confronting his situation. In addition Burke argues that the "dramatistic" perspective, with its cycle of terms--order, negative, disorder, sin, guilt, redemption through victimage--is the paradigmatic form necessary for understanding both literature and social relationships. Duncan extends Burke's argument by insisting that society arises in and continues to exist through the communication of significant symbols by which emotions, ideas, roles and social relationships are given symbolic form. Like Burke, Duncan is working in the tradition established by such men as John Dewey, George

Herbert Mead, and Bronislaw Malinowski. Duncan contends that if man is essentially a creature of praxis, this action must take certain specific forms. The function of literature is to perfect forms which make communication and, hence, action possible.

In interpreting Marx and Engels' "basic inventory of ideas" concerning the nature of the relationship between art and society, I used illustrations drawn from the work of some of the American pragmatists such as Dewey, Mead, Burke, and Duncan. My purpose was to clarify some of Marx and Engels' ideas and to suggest that the two traditions--Marxism and pragmatism--were basically compatible and complementary. However, despite the apparent congruous nature of the two traditions there has been scarcely any effort by contemporary Marxist critics to understand, assess, or to utilize the ideas which have come out of the American pragmatic tradition. The situation is all the more paradoxical when one realizes that pragmatism, like Marxism, is basically a framework for thinking about man as a creature of praxis. For Burke, literature is a symbolic act upon a specific scene, and for Duncan literature is the examination of the possibilities of human action. Both Burke and Duncan draw heavily on the work of George Herbert Mead, and, as the sociologist Peter Berger has said, the basic task which confronts Marxists today is the investigation of Mead's

thought and its relationship to Marxist theory. As for Burke and Duncan, however, I have read no contemporary Marxist critic who acknowledges their existence.

A thoroughgoing Marxist critique of Burke and Duncan's work would be valuable not only for Marxist criticism but would be helpful for those critics who are working exclusively within the framework of Burke and Duncan's ideas. For example, a Marxist perspective can furnish a corrective to Burke and Duncan's almost "therapeutic" view of the function of literature. Both men tend to see literature as a mode of social "adaptation," but the Marxist, by showing how literature can function as a mode of "domination" can demonstrate the importance of the social role of the critic whose function it is to interpret these symbols in light of specific aesthetic and social values. The Marxist critic can show how literature, instead of being simply a way in which writers and publics come to terms with their situation, can be instrumental as a means of coercion or as a means of man's freedom. The Marxist critic can illustrate how literature is functioning as ideology.

Marxists assert the priority of economic conditions which determine the form of social relationships. Certainly Burke would not object to this assumption. From his point of view all acts are acts upon a "scene" (society, environment, context, etc.). The scene

"contains" the act (symbolic or non-symbolic) and has a great deal to do with determining its form and function. On the other hand, it is necessary for Marxists to realize that it is not the writer's task to make a detailed, specific analysis of economics or capitalist society. Kenneth Burke argues this point very persuasively:

. . . the objective factors giving rise to a code of moral and aesthetic values are, of course, economic. They are the "substructure" that supports the ideological "superstructure." But the objective materials utilized by an individual writer are largely the moral and aesthetic values themselves. For instance, new methods of production gave rise to the change from feudal to bourgeois values. But Shakespeare's strategy as a dramatist was formed by relation to this conflict between feudal and bourgeois values. This "superstructural" element was the objective, social material he manipulated in eliciting his audience's response. Economic factors gave rise to a transition in values, but he dealt with the transition in values.

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In sum, economic conditions give form to the values; and these values, having arisen from "objective material" which the artist works in constructing symbols that appeal.³⁹

Further, human beings can act toward the world only on the basis of their understanding, and while it does not follow from this that the world possesses the character which they "understand" it to have, nevertheless they act

³⁹ Kenneth Burke, The Philosophy of Literary Form (rev. ed.), p. 266. The entire last section of this study is so heavily indebted to the work of Kenneth Burke and Hugh Duncan that it is difficult to give credit where it is due; so much of what is theirs I have made mine, that even where I do not give any specific reference, I acknowledge my dependence on their work.

on this understanding. Marxists have failed to make this distinction clear.

There is a corollary to this last proposition and, in a sense, it goes to the very heart of the dilemma which Marxists face when discussing the function of symbols. As Alfred North Whitehead has concluded, knowledge is mediated by sensation (as when one is hit on the head) or through a symbolic screen (as when one understands the meaning of the thump on the head), and all action is either "pure instinctive action, reflex action, [or] symbolically conditioned actions."⁴⁰ Whitehead's propositions describe two aspects of existence, "knowing" and "acting." As for knowing, Kenneth Burke claims that the importance of symbols has been overlooked. Symbols are the observable data of social experience, and man "is a symbol using animal." This is not a revolutionary statement, but most people are reluctant to dwell on its revolutionary implications. Burke observes:

The "symbol-using animal," yes, obviously. But how can we bring ourselves to realize just what that formula implies, just how overwhelmingly much of what we mean by "reality" has been built up for us through nothing but our symbol systems? Take away our books, and what little do we know about history, biography, even something so "down to earth" as the relative position of seas and continents? What is our "reality" for today (beyond the paper-thin line of our own particular

⁴⁰ A. N. Whitehead, Symbolism, pp. 1-6, 78.

lives) but all this clutter of symbols about the past combined with whatever things we know mainly through maps, magazines, newspapers, and the like about the present? In school, as they go from class to class, students turn from one idiom to another. The various courses in the curriculum are in effect but so many different terminologies. And however important to us is the tiny sliver of reality each of us has experienced first hand, the whole overall "picture" is but a construct of our symbol systems. To meditate on this fact until one sees its full implications is much like peering over the edge of things into an ultimate abyss. And doubtless that's one reason why, though man is typically the symbol-using animal, he clings to a kind of naive verbal realism that refuses to realize the full extent of the role played by symbolicity in his notions of reality.⁴¹

As for behavior, man's actions can be described as "animal" or "human" depending on whether or not he uses symbols. Man is the only creature that can "discourse about discourse." Leslie White, in The Science of Culture claims:

The behavior of man is of two distinct kinds: symbolic and non-symbolic. Man yawns, stretches, coughs, scratches himself, cries out in pain, shrinks with fear, "bristles" with anger, and so on. Non-symbolic behavior of this sort is not peculiar to man; he shares it not only with the other primates but with many other animal species as well. But man communicates with his fellows with articulate speech, uses amulets, confesses sins, makes laws, observes etiquette, explains his dreams, classifies his relatives in designated categories, and so on. This kind of behavior is unique; only man is capable of it; it is peculiar to man because it consists of, or is dependent upon, the use of symbols. The non-symbolic behavior of *Homo sapiens* is the behavior of man the animal; the symbolic behavior is that of man the human

⁴¹Kenneth Burke, Language as Symbolic Action: Essays on Life, Literature and Method (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1966), p. 5.

being. It is the symbol which has transformed man from a mere animal to a human animal.⁴²

But symbols are involved in more than overt behavior; they are inherent in the nature of action itself. Marx says that man is a creature of praxis. This means that the basic unit of observation is the "act." And, as Talcott Parsons writes, this involves several elements:

(1) It implies an agent, an "actor." (2) For purposes of definition the act must have an "end," a future state of affairs toward which the process of action is orientated ["the scheme of action is inherently teleological"]. (3) It must be initiated in a "situation" in which the trends of development differ in one or more important respects from the state of affairs to which the action is orientated, the end. This situation is in turn analyzable into two elements: those over which the actor has no control, that is which he cannot alter, or prevent from being altered, in conformity with this end, and those over which he has such control. The former may be termed the "conditions" of action, the latter the "means." (4) Finally there is inherent in the conception of this unity, in its analytical uses, a certain mode of relationship between means to end, in so far as the situation allows alternatives, there is a "normative" orientation of action.⁴³

From this definition of "act," one is able to think about the function of symbols in action. For example, the "end" must be symbolic, for the future, by definition, does not exist. Further, "actor" implies role (a "cluster of

⁴²Leslie A. White, The Science of Culture: The Study of Man and Civilization (New York: Grove Press, 1949), pp. 34-35.

⁴³Talcott Parsons, The Structure of Social Action: A Study in Social Theory with Special Reference to a Group of Recent European Writers, 2nd ed. (New York: The Free Press, 1949), p. 44.

rights and obligations"),⁴⁴ and roles must be communicated in symbolic systems, just as "norms" must be expressed in symbols.

While the function of symbols seems obvious, the nature of symbols is mysterious. No one has been able to come up with a satisfactory definition of symbols and symbolism. Ashley Montagu defines symbol as "an abstract meaning value conferred by those who use it upon anything, tangible or intangible."⁴⁵ Susanne Langer defines it as "any device whereby we are enabled to make an abstraction."⁴⁶ Symbolism, then, is not a medium of communication but a way in which concepts are transmitted by means of mediums. Further, while the history and functions of symbols may be described in logical discourse, the process of symbolism itself is psychological. (Noam Chomsky argues that it may be physiological, that symbolic structures may correspond to real structures in the mind.)

This should not lead one to believe that symbols have only private meanings, that they are merely "subjective." On the contrary, it is only because they are

⁴⁴Michael Banton, Roles: An Introduction to the Study of Social Relations (New York: Basic Books, 1965), p. 2.

⁴⁵Ashley Montagu, "Communication, Evolution, and Education," in The Human Dialogue: Perspectives on Communication, eds. Floyd Matson and Ashley Montagu (New York: The Free Press, 1967), p. 446.

⁴⁶Susanne K. Langer, Feeling and Form (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953), p. 11.

social that they have any meaning at all. George Herbert Mead was one of the first to realize this all-pervasive nature of symbols and their generation in social interaction. In addition, somehow symbols seem to be able to add the elements of instinct and emotion to rationalization. And when symbols are combined into complex systems, there seems to be no limit to the scope and persuasiveness of symbolic activity in man's life; symbolic activity satisfies deep human cravings.

Symbols derive their power from their association with other powerful, cultural contexts (what Malinowski calls "contexts of situation") and the fact that they can be communicated. Kenneth Burke distinguishes the symbol from symbolism by designating the former as "scientific" (capable of atomistic or logical analysis). The latter he calls "dramatistic" (a totality more psychologically orientated); this is captured and communicated in art, rhetoric, myth, religion, advertising, etc. Indeed, it is only because it can be communicated that the "self" and society exist. This is Mead's contribution to social theory; it is summed up by Bernard N. Meltzer:

The human individual is born into a society characterized by symbolic interaction. The use of significant symbols by those around him enables him to pass from the conversation of gestures--which involves direct, unmeaningful response to the overt acts of others--to the occasional taking of the roles of others. Concurrent with role-taking, the self develops, i.e. the capacity to act towards oneself. Action toward oneself comes to take the

form of viewing oneself from the standpoint, or perspective, of the generalized other (the composite representative of others, of society, within the individual), which implies defining one's behavior in terms of others. In the process of such viewing of oneself, the individual must carry on symbolic interaction with himself, involving the internal conversation between his impulsive aspect ("I") and the incorporated perspective of others (The "Me"). The mind or mental activity, is present in behavior whenever such symbolic interaction goes on--whether the individual is merely "thinking" (in the everyday sense of the word) or is also interacting with another individual. (In both cases the individual must indicate things to himself.) Mental activity necessarily involves meanings, which usually attach to, and define objects. The meaning of an object or event is simply an image of the pattern of action which defines the object or event. That is the completion in one's imagination of an act, or the mental picture of the actions and experiences symbolized by an object, defines the act or object. In the unity of study that Mead calls "the act," all of the foregoing processes are usually entailed. . . . human society (characterized by symbolic interaction) both precedes the rise of individual selves and minds, and is maintained by the rise of individual selves and minds. This means, then, that symbolic interaction is both the medium for the development of human beings and the process by which human beings associate as human beings.⁴⁷

Meaning is social; it arises in the response of one individual to another; it is a triadic relationship between gesture, the adjustive response to that gesture, and the resultant social act. At the same time, these responses have certain forms which are not determined solely by the individual. Maurice Natanson makes this clear:

⁴⁷ Bernard N. Meltzer, "Mead's Social Psychology," in Symbolic Interaction: A Reader in Social Psychology, eds. Jerome G. Manis and Bernard N. Meltzer (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1967), p. 19.

. . . to assert at this point that meaning derives from relationship to the other through significant symbols would be to ignore Mead's clear warning that meaning is pre-given in the social process out of which conceptual thought later develops. Thus, while "the response of one organism to the gesture of another in any given social act is the meaning of that gesture," such meaning is initially and objectively embedded in the social process, apart from individual consciousness. Meaning can be stated in terms of symbols or language because "language simply lifts out of the social process a situation which is logically or implicitly there already."⁴⁸

Even if one claims, as Marxists do, that the need to survive forces man into association and organizes him into a society, it is still necessary to demonstrate how this society organizes and reorganizes itself and how men are able to associate with one another (in hate as well as in love). It is necessary to know the form of this organization and to try to understand who or what determines this form. If language and other symbol systems arise out of man's need to associate in his struggle to master his environment, it is still necessary to demonstrate how this language operates. In short, we must understand how symbols function in society. How is it possible to understand the social function of literature unless one has a general theory of the social function of symbols? If literature is a form of ideology, how does this form function? How does ideology function? And if

⁴⁸Maurice Natanson, The Social Dynamics of George Herbert Mead, intro. Horace M. Kallen (Washington, D.C.: Public Affairs Press, 1956), p. 10.

ideology is communicated in symbolic systems, how is it possible to "explain" the symbols by reference to the non-symbolic? (This is not only a problem of Marxists; Freud's quandry is of a similar nature: how could he know anything about the workings of the unconscious if the unconscious was, by definition closed to perception? His answer was the symbol, which supposedly was a by-product of an unconscious human process; the symbol was the key to interpreting the workings of the unconscious.)

Gerth and Mills say that in order to comprehend the way a person "strives, feels, and thinks," it is necessary to understand "the symbols he has internalized."⁴⁹ At the same time, it is necessary to know how various institutions use these same symbols to coordinate their activities and legitimize their power. Symbols are necessary to the maintenance of institutions, to their hierarchies of "authority," and to the determination of roles. Gerth and Mills characterize these symbols as "dramatic, solemn, weird," and the environment in which they appear as "staged." When used to legitimate authority, these symbols are termed symbols of "'legitimation,' or 'master symbols,' or 'symbols of justification'" (Burke calls them "God-terms"). In terms of the individual, "by lending

⁴⁹Hans Gerth and C. Wright Mills, Character and Social Structure: The Psychology of Social Institutions (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1954), p. 274.

meaning to the enactment of given roles, these master symbols sanction the person in re-acting the roles. When internalized, they form unquestioned categories which channel and delimit new experiences; they promote and constrain activities." These symbols are not just overt forms of propaganda; once internalized they become the basis of men's actions. They appear not as dogma but as "facts. In the experience of men enacting the roles of their society, they seem 'inevitable categories of the human mind.' Men do not look on them merely as correct opinion, for they have become so much a part of the mind, and lie so far back, that they are never really conscious of them at all. They do not see them, but other things through them." Here is Marx's ideology; these are the "ruling ideas of the ruling class." Any institution or class which has control over the communication of these symbols becomes very powerful indeed:

Those in authority within institutions and social structures attempt to justify their rule by linking it, as if it were a necessary consequence, with moral symbols, sacred emblems, or legal formulae, which are widely believed and deeply internalized. These central conceptions may refer to a god or gods, the "votes of the majority," the "will of the people," the "aristocracy of talents or wealth," to the "divine right of kings," or to the allegedly extraordinary endowment of the person of the ruler himself [i.e., charisma].

Various thinkers have used different terms to refer to this phenomenon: Mosca's "political formula" or "great superstitions," Locke's "principle of sovereignty," Sorel's "ruling myth," Thurman Arnold's "folklore," Weber's "legitimations," Durkheim's "collective representations,"

Marx's "dominant ideas," Rousseau's "general will," Lasswell's "symbols of authority," or "symbols of justification," Mannheim's "ideology," Herbert Spencer's "public sentiments"--all testify to the central place of master symbols in social analysis.⁵⁰

If Marxists are serious about wanting to change society, then they must pay attention to these "master symbols" and the way they function. As literary critics, they must examine the function literature plays in this process, but before they can do this they need a method for examining the nature of literary communication, for the method they use will determine the kind of answers they can discover. Further, they need to develop a series of propositions which are based on a theory of communication as action in society rather than as a theory of knowledge about society.

In the late Twenties and into the Thirties (and continuing up into the present), Kenneth Burke was using Freud, Malinowski, Marx, and many others to develop a way of thinking about the social function of literature. Counter-Statement, his first book devoted to critical theory, appeared in 1931. Although Christopher Caudwell was familiar with The Dial--his only published poem, "Once Did I Think," appeared in The Dial, 82 (March, 1927), 187--he evidently was not acquainted with Burke, who was a contributor, reviewer, translator and editor of The Dial

⁵⁰ Ibid., pp. 276-77.

in the Twenties. In fact, Burke's work has gone almost virtually unnoticed by the British until quite recently, and the belated "official" recognition of Burke's achievements is itself an interesting aspect of the development of modern British criticism and a comment on its insularity.⁵¹ During the 1930's Burke was a Marxist, and as William Rueckert says, "The influence of Marx--or perhaps 'theoretical communism'--on Burke has been profound. . . . The emphasis upon the reality of economic motivation that first appeared in Burke's work during the thirties has stayed with him right up to the present."⁵² American Marxist and "orthodox" Communists treated Burke with qualified but genuine respect.⁵³

Even for those critics who are familiar with the work of Malinowski, Freud, Marx, Richards, Mead, and Aristotle, Burke's thought is not always clear; his most

⁵¹Out of the 161 works about Kenneth Burke listed in William H. Rueckert's Critical Responses to Kenneth Burke 1924-1966 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1969), only two appeared in Britain, the first being Marius Bewley's "Kenneth Burke as Literary Critic," which was reprinted in The Complex Fate (London: Chatto and Windus) and did not appear until 1952. Bewley's article first appeared in Scrutiny, 15, No. 4 (December, 1948), 254-77, and it is a flat rejection of Burke's whole system as well as an attack on his socialist leanings.

⁵²William Rueckert, Kenneth Burke: And the Drama of Human Relations (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1963), p. 242. Rueckert's study is the best introduction to Burke's writings.

⁵³See for example, Margaret Schlauch, rev. of Attitudes Toward History in Science and Society, 2 (1937-38), 128-32.

ardent disciples concede that to follow Burke is an exhausting task. Nevertheless, it is vital for Marxist critics to understand the nature of Burke's achievement, for it seems to me that only through studying the writings of Burke and those of his followers will Marxist critics be in a position to create a complete and relatively exhaustive method for studying the social function of literature. For the past forty years Burke has been "discoursing on discourse," and his definition of literature as symbolic action is easily amenable to a Marxian perspective.

His definition is open to scientific examination. In his Philosophy of Literary Form (1941), Burke states the definition clearly and illustrates it at great length, and his "Fact, Inference, and Proof in the Analysis of Literary Symbolism" (1954) is an elegant defense of his method. It is a definition which had already been used by Malinowski in his studies of meaning among the Trobrianders (i.e., his whole discussion of meaning in magic is based on the assumption that a word means what it does for those sharing in the use of it). It can encompass all verbal structures, not just literature. It gets around the "subject-object," "individual-society," dichotomy by assuming (as Malinowski and Mead do) that the word manipulator (writer, rhetorician, etc.) is acting in terms of the needs of his audience. Further, it

creates the possibility of evolving a method of meaning analysis which can be useful. In this respect, Burke draws not so much on Malinowski but on Freud and Marx. Where Freud used the sexual wish and Marx the economic interest as their basic categories, Burke uses communication, the symbolic act, as his basic concept. Burke's method, however, draws heavily on Freud's analysis of symbolism, particularly in the areas of free-association, "condensation," and "displacement," and on Marx's analysis of class, ideology, and social mystification (e.g., his analysis of the "transcendental" nature of money in bourgeois society). To read Burke is to understand something about what occurs in human relationships as a consequence of man's ability to use symbols. Hugh Duncan contends,

More than any other writer, Burke has taught us that the names we give to things, events, and people determine our behavior toward them. And he has done so not by repeating this is so, but by showing how it is so. For Burke is never content to exhort us to think in a certain way; he is a methodologist seeking always to develop tools for demonstrating the effect of symbols on human motivation.

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 Words are not merely "signs"; they are names whose "attachment" to events, objects, persons, institutions, status groups, classes, and indeed any great or small collective, soon tends to determine what we do in regard to the bearer of the name. War on poverty has recently been declared. Yet no matter how much money is voted for the eradication of poverty, the first battle that must be won is the symbolic battle over how to name poverty. Are the poor lazy, degenerate, shiftless, sick, evil, childlike, cunning, ignorant, proud, humble, victimized, or unfortunate? The name we give to poverty

largely determines how we fight the war against it.⁵⁴

To say that he owes much to Malinowski, Freud and Marx is merely to indicate the tradition that Burke is working in when he is concerned with the social function of literature. For the most part, his career has been occupied with the problem of how to track down the meaning of a literary utterance (Hyman, in The Armed Vision, treats him as a formalist), and it is for this reason that Duncan claims that Burke's main concern is one of method. Even though he uses Malinowski, Freud, and Marx, their methods provide only partial solutions for Burke's problems. For example, he is not satisfied with what he calls the "environmentalist schools" of literary analysis:

Words are aspects of a much wider communicative context, most of which is not verbal at all. Yet words also have a nature peculiarly their own. And when discussing them as modes of action, we must consider both this nature as words in themselves and the nature they get from the non-verbal scenes that support their acts. I shall be happy if the reader can say of this book that, while always considering words as acts upon a scene, it avoids the excess of environmentalist schools which are usually so eager to trace the relationships between act and scene that they neglect to trace the structure of the act itself.⁵⁵

Burke proposes to avoid the subject-object dilemma by

⁵⁴Hugh Dalziel Duncan, "Introduction," to Permanence and Change, 2nd rev. ed. (1954 rpt. New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965), pp. xiv, xv.

⁵⁵Kenneth Burke, The Philosophy of Literary Form (1941), p. viii; third emphasis added.

adopting the concept of symbolic action:

Critical and imaginative works are the answers to questions posed by the situation in which they arose. They are not merely answers, they are strategic answers. For there is a difference in style or strategy, if one says "yes" in tonalities that imply "thank God" or in tonalities that imply "alas!" So I should propose an initial distinction between "strategies" and "situation" whereby we think of poetry (I here use the term to include any work of critical or imaginative cast) as adopting of various strategies for the encompassing of the situations. These strategies size up situations, name their structure and outstanding ingredients, and name them in a way that contains an attitude towards them.⁵⁶

An objective analysis of poetry (in Burke's context this term includes all creative and imaginative thought from the metaphors of the scientist--man considered as a machine, for example--to those of the poet) will give us an index and a catalogue of these strategies. Thus, in discussing the social effects of literature, he says, "A discussion of effectiveness in literature should be able to include unintended effects as well as intended ones. Also, such a discussion will be diagnostic rather than hortatory; it will be more concerned with how effects are produced than with what effects should be produced."⁵⁷ Beginning with Counter-Statement (1931), Permanence and Change (1935), Attitudes Toward History (1937), and in The Philosophy of Literary Form (1941), Burke is largely occupied with this

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 1.

⁵⁷ Kenneth Burke, Counter-Statement, p. 123.

task. The results of his work can be examined by consulting some of his early statements in the "Lexicon Rhetoricae" of Counter-Statement, the "Dictionary of Pivotal Terms" in Attitudes Toward History, or "The Philosophy of Literary Form," and "Literature as Equipment for Living," in The Philosophy of Literary Form.

Burke's method is best described in his own words:

. . . Let us suppose that a writer has piled up a considerable body of work: and upon inspecting the lot, we find that there has been great selectivity in his adoption of dramatic roles. We find that his roles have not been like "reporting acting," but like "type casting." This "statistical view" of his work, in disclosing a trend, put us on the track of the ways in which the selection of role is a symbolic act. . . .

Now the work of every writer contains a set of implicit equations. He uses "associational clusters." And you may, by examining his work, find "what goes with what" in these clusters--what kind of acts and images and personalities and situations go with his notions of heroism, villainy, consolation, despair, etc. And though he is perfectly conscious of selecting a certain kind of imagery to reinforce a certain kind of mood, etc., he cannot possibly be conscious of the interrelationships among all these equations. Afterwards, by inspecting his work "statistically," we or he may disclose by objective citation the structure of motive operating here. There is no need to "supply" motives. The interrelationships themselves are his motives. For they are his situation; and situation is but another word for motives. The motivation out of which he writes is synonymous with the structural way in which he puts events and values together when he writes; and however consciously he may go about such work, there is a kind of generalization about these interrelationships that he could not have been conscious of, since the generalization could be made by the kind of inspection that is possible only after the completion of the work.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ The Philosophy of Literary Form, p. 20.

In his essay, "Fact Inference and Proof in the Analysis of Literary Symbolism" (1954), Burke substitutes "Theory of the Index" for "statistical view," defends the method and shows how it can be used to analyze Joyce's A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man.⁵⁹

An analysis of the symbolic structure of a work will produce a dictionary of pivotal terms. These terms are basic types of adjustment to situations in which the writer must act:

Where does the drama get its materials? From the "unending conversation" that is going on at the point in history when we are born. Imagine that you enter a parlor. You come late. When you arrive, others have long preceded you, and they are engaged in a heated discussion, a discussion too heated for them to pause and tell you exactly what it is about. In fact, the discussion had already begun long before any of them present got there, so that no one is qualified to retrace for you all the steps that had gone before. You listen for awhile, until you decide that you have caught the tenor of the argument; then you put in your oar. Someone answers; you answer him; another comes to your defense; another aligns himself against you, to either the embarrassment or gratification of your opponent, depending upon the quality of your ally's assistance. However, the discussion is interminable. The hour grows late, you must depart. And you do depart, with the discussion still vigorously in progress.

But this "unending conversation" takes place in a situation, or against a social background which must be understood:

Nor is this verbal action all there is to it. For all these words are grounded in what Malinowski

⁵⁹The essay is in Symbols and Values: An Initial Study, Thirteenth Symposium of the Conference on Science, Philosophy and Religion (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1954), pp. 283-306.

would call "contexts of situation." And very important among these "contexts of situation" are the kind of factors considered by Bentham, Marx, and Veblen, the material interests (of private or class structure) that you symbolically defend or symbolically align yourself with in the course of making your assertions [e.g., the concept of style as identification]. These interests do not "cause" your discussion; its "cause" is in the genius of man himself as homo loquax. But they greatly affect the idiom in which you speak, and so the idiom by which you think. Or, if you would situate the genius of man in a moral aptitude, we could say that this moral aptitude is universally present in all men, to a varying degree, but that it must express itself through a medium, and this medium is in turn grounded in material structures. In different property structures, the moral aptitude has a correspondingly different idiom through which to speak.⁶⁰

As Burke says in Permanence and Change, "morals are fists," and our Weltanschauung or orientation "tends to become a self-perpetuating structure, creating the measures by which it shall be measured. It moves to form a closed circle, though individual or class divergencies ever tend to break the regularity . . . the circle is basically ethical."⁶¹ This symbolic defense or alignment may take various forms. We may find ourselves alienated, "driven into a corner," "bureaucratizing the imaginative," "discounting," "repossessing the world," etc., but always, Burke says, "our thoughts and actions are affected by our interests." The manifestations of this "ethical or creative

⁶⁰The Philosophy of Literary Form, pp. 111-12.

⁶¹Burke, Permanence and Change, p. 262.

impulse" may take many interrelated forms:

. . . orientation, rationalization, motivation, interpretation, verbalization, socialization, communication, expectancy, meaning, "illusion," occupational psychosis, trained incapacity, means-selecting, attention, "escape," style, sense of what goes with what, piety, propriety, property (tools and "shelter"), custom, ingratiating, inducement, "hypocrisy" ritual, right, virtue, power, utility, analogical extension, "peripheral charging," abstraction, logic, "cause," purpose, will, metaphor, perspective, "conversion" method, "nudism," point of view, statistics, symbolism, situation, simplification, prejudice, censoriousness, vocation, sympathy, "egotistic-altruistic merger," ethicizing of the means of support, inferiority, "burden," obsession, "genius," guilt, doubt, symbolic and necessitous labor, "justification," education, evangelism, legislation, action, combat, participation, ultimate situation or motive, ethical universe-building, "opportunistic revision," and recalcitrance. Let us call the whole complex: civilization.⁶²

Burke argues that this "ethical universe building" is the only kind of orientation possible. The conclusion which is drawn is that "the ultimate metaphor for discussing the universe and man's relations to it must be the poetic or dramatic metaphor. . . . And since poetry is essentially ethical, the poetic metaphor clearly identifies the ethical with the aesthetic. In Hellenic fashion defining the 'beautiful' life as the 'good' life."⁶³ In The Philosophy of Literary Form, Burke sums up his perspective:

The general perspective that is interwoven with our methodology of analysis might be summarily characterized as a theory of drama. We propose to take

⁶² Ibid., pp. 262-63.

⁶³ Ibid., pp. 263, 266.

ritual drama as the Ur-form, the "hub" with all other aspects of human action treated as spokes radiating from this hub. That is, the social sphere is considered in terms of situations and acts, in contrast with the physical sphere, which is considered in mechanistic terms, idealized as a flat cause-and-effect or stimulus-and-response relationship. Ritual drama is considered as the culminating form, from this point of view, and any other form is to be considered as the "efficient" over-stressing of one or another of the ingredients found in ritual drama.⁶⁴

The essence of art is drama, and the essence of life is drama. This is the structure of Marx's praxis and Talcott Parsons' "unit act."

From the preceding discussion one can see that Burke is dedicated to a "return" to a "dramatistic" perspective on literature. The literary critic should investigate and interpret the relations of literary symbols to the forms and processes of social organization. In his essay, "Literature as Equipment for Living,"⁶⁵ Burke explains what such a critical study would be like. The following few pages are simply a summary and paraphrase of his major ideas on this matter.

The Marxist literary critic and the sociologist would do well to begin their approaches to literature with the study of proverbs for clues to the way in which "pure" literature functions. In proverbs, words are designed for consolation, vengeance, admonition, exhortation,

⁶⁴The Philosophy of Literary Form, p. 103.

⁶⁵Ibid., pp. 293-304.

foreshadowing, etc. (This is similar to Malinowski's conception of magic.) Proverbs are also used to name typical or recurrent situations. People find a certain social relationship recurring so frequently that they must "have a word for it." Social structures give rise to "type" situations, subtle sub-divisions of the relationships involved in competitive and cooperative acts. Proverbs seek to "chart" these "type" situations. Hence, we might classify proverbs as consolatory, prophetic, etc. And if we agree that proverbs provide clues to how groups using them deal with specific situations, and assume that certain situations are typical and recurrent in a given social structure, we then have a number of possibilities for dealing with these indices in a scientific manner. That is, we can classify them, compare them, etc., as isolated units of meaning.

Why not extend such an analysis of proverbs to encompass the whole field of literature? Could the most complex and sophisticated works of art be legitimately considered somewhat as "proverbs writ large"? Babbitt then could be viewed as the strategic naming of a situation since it singles out a pattern of experience that is sufficiently representative of our social structure, that recurs often enough for people to "need a word for it." Like Caudwell, Burke believes that the genesis of literature arises out of the tension between the artist's

experience and traditional forms which do not encompass this new experience. Each work of art is the addition of a word to an informal dictionary (or, in the case of purely derivative artists, the addition of a subsidiary meaning to a word already given by some originating artist). This process may be seen at another level when one reads through Mencken's The American Language. Here one sees people who were faced with a new set of typical recurrent situations, situations typical of their business, their politics, their criminal organizations, their sports. Either there were no words for these in standard English, people did not know how to use them, or they did not "sound right." There is no reason to believe that Americans were possessed of some divine gift for creating slang. American slang was developed out of the fact that new typical situations had arisen and people needed names for them. They had to "size things up." They had to console and strike, to promise and admonish. They had to describe for purposes of forecasting.

From this perspective, critics could attempt to codify the various strategies which artists have developed in relation to the naming of situations. In a sense, much of this criticism would be "timeless" for many of the "typical, recurrent situations" are not peculiar to our own civilization at all. (Here Burke eliminates the dependence upon some theory of instincts, "collective

unconscious," or "genotype." From a Marxist point of view, this makes more sense, for it focuses on the environment.) The situations and strategies in Aesop's Fables apply to human relations now just as fully as they applied to ancient Greece. Such strategies extend far beyond the particular combination of events named by them at any one time, and thus are on a level of generalization high enough to apply to any culture. A given human relationship may be at one time named in terms of foxes and lions, if there are foxes and lions about; or it may be named in terms of salesmanship, advertising, the tactics of the politicians, etc. But beneath the particulars, we may often discern the naming of the one situation. (This is very similar to Empson's point of view in Some Versions of the Pastoral. Burke reviewed Empson's book for the New Republic, describing it as "profoundly Marxist" and an "exceptional book.")

One of the tasks of the critic would then be to assemble and codify literary lore of this type. Obviously this would have little to do with the established canon of literary criticism since from Burke's point of view, a sermon and a dirty joke might be grouped by the situation they were dealing with. Such criticism would result in the creation of categories in which works of art would be considered as strategies for selecting enemies and allies, for socializing losses, for warding off "the evil eye,"

for purification, propitiation, and desanctification, consolation and vengeance, admonition and exhortation, implicit commands or instructions of one kind or another. Art forms, like "tragedy" or "comedy" or "satire" would be treated as equipment for living that size up situations in various ways and in keeping with correspondingly various attitudes. The typical ingredients of such forms would be stressed. (This is very close to Marx's and Engels' idea of "typicality," i.e., "typical characters in typical situations.") Their comparative values would be considered, with the intention of formulating a "strategy of strategies," the "cover-all" strategy obtained from the inspection of the whole.

If one is to avoid the sterility of the new-Aristotelian emphasis on structure as such, one must "approach the work as the functioning of the structure." One would make more relevant arguments about the distribution of men and postures on a football field if he could see the distribution in light of the tactics employed for the attainment of the game's purpose than if he did not know the game's purpose. Hence anything that gives clues to purpose is useful insofar as one's interests extend beyond aesthetic appreciation.

It is possible that the question of how one knows that the poem is doing the same thing for its readers as it is doing for its author, can be confronted by using

Burke's distinction between the "public symbolic act" and the "private symbolic act." (This is similar to Mead's "I" and "Me.") There may well be a cluster of images and concepts that do something for the poet that they do not do for anyone else. However, meaning is social. Hugh Duncan observes,

Whatever may be the "inner" experience of the writer, however fantastic it may be, once he writes, he makes use of a set of consensually validated symbols, the language of his time and place, which insofar as these symbols are communicative at all, must be so because they mean the same thing to the reader as they do to the writer. This meaning is an approximation only, because neither the writer nor his reader has lived through the same experience in the same way, but they have both lived through this experience within the same symbol systems and hence what they "mean" to communicate of their experience will be determined by what they can communicate.⁶⁶

Burke admits that there may be clusters of images which are not open to analysis; communication is never perfect.

In 1941, Burke advanced the following scheme for the analysis of the act in poetry:

dream (the unconscious or subconscious factors . . .),

prayer (the communicative function of a poem, which leads us into the many considerations of form, since the poet's inducements can lead us to participate in his poem only in so far as his work has a public, or communicative structure--the factor slighted by the various expressionistic doctrines, the Art for Art's sake school stressing the work solely as the poet's externalizing of himself. . . .),

chart (the realistic sizing-up of situations that is sometimes explicit, sometimes implicit, in

⁶⁶Duncan, Language and Literature in Society, pp. 9-10.

poetic strategies--the factor that Richards and the psychoanalysts have slighted.)⁶⁷

In 1945, Burke enlarged this triadic scheme into a pentad that he claims is valid for any act:

In a rounded statement about motives, you must have some word that names the act (names what took place in thought or deed), and another that names the scene (the background of the act, the situation in which it occurred); also, you must indicate what person or kind of person (agent) performed the act, what means or instruments he used (agency) and the purpose. Men may violently disagree about the purposes behind a given act, or about the character who did it, or how he did it, or in what kind of situation he acted; or they may even insist upon totally different words to name the act itself. But be that as it may, any complete statement about motives will offer some kind of answers to these five questions: what was done (act), when or where was it done (scene), who did it (agent), how he did it (agency), and why (purpose).⁶⁸

By 1966, Burke was suggesting the possibility of another term: "The pattern [i.e., the pentad] is incipiently a hexad, in connection with the different but complementary analysis of attitude (as an ambiguous term for incipient action), in George Herbert Mead's social psychology (see his Philosophy of Art) and in I. A. Richards' psychology of art (see Principles of Literary Criticism)."⁶⁹ The

⁶⁷ The Philosophy of Literary Form, pp. 5-6.

⁶⁸ Kenneth Burke, A Grammar of Motives and A Rhetoric of Motives. 2 Volumes in One (1945, 1950 rpt. Cleveland and New York: World Publishing Co., 1962), I, xvii.

⁶⁹ Kenneth Burke, "Dramatism," in Communication: Concepts and Perspectives, ed. Lee Thayer (Washington, D. C.: Spartan Books, 1967), p. 332.

assumptions underlying this method are as follows:

I do not contend that the mode of analysis here proposed is automatically free of subjective interpretations. I do contend that an undiscussable dictionary is avoided (as were one to have a set of absolute meanings for every kind of symbol, and to simply "translate" a book from its exoteric idiom to the corresponding esoteric one). To know what "shoe, or house or bridge" means, you don't begin with a "symbolist dictionary" already written in advance. You must, by inductive inspection of a given work, discover the particular contexts in which the shoe, house, or bridge occur. You cannot, in advance, know what the equational structure it will have membership. . . .

The general approach might be called "pragmatic" in this sense: it assumes that a poem's structure is to be described most accurately by thinking always of the poem's function. It assumes that the poem is designed to "do something" for the poet and his readers, and what we can make the most relevant observations about its design by considering the poem as an embodiment of this act. In the poet, we might say, the poetizing existed as a physiological function. The poem is its corresponding anatomic structure. And the reader, in participating in the poem, breathes into this anatomic structure a new physiological vitality that resembles, though with a difference, the act of its maker, the resemblance being the overlap between the writer's and the reader's situation, the difference being in the fact that these two situations are far from identical.⁷⁰

Whatever the difficulties and problems raised by Burke's approach, at least he is creating a method for dealing with the literary work from the "inside out." When the Marxist critic uses his method, he is not left with the problem of establishing a relationship between social factors drawn from an economic analysis and the literary work itself. To say that a passage in Keats, for example,

⁷⁰The Philosophy of Literary Form, pp. 89-90.

"means" X because factor X existed in the world of Keats as an economic factor, requires not only that the critic show that both existed at a given time and place (or within a given pattern) but that the passage and the meanings derived from them are actually "representative," "typical" or "characteristic" of Keats.

Certainly Burke's method of establishing "associational clusters" derived from the literary work itself avoids these traditional Marxist pitfalls since it does what any serious scientific method must do: it points to a body of objects or "facts" (the words, the verbal images). When, for example, he points out that in Clifford Odets' Golden Boy, the prize-fight "equals competition, cult of money, leaving home, getting the girl, while violin equals cooperative social unity, disdain of money, staying home, not needing the girl,"⁷¹ he has said something that can be tested. By asking himself whether or not these values really surround the symbols that Burke says they do, the critic is asking a question that can be answered with reference to the author's work, not to a series of abstractions based on such terms as "class," "decadence," etc., which Marxists are so prone to make. The critic thus directs his attention to the work itself, at the beginning of his investigation, rather than at the end, which is

⁷¹Ibid., p. 33.

what happens when Marxists (and other critics) deal with economics, politics, religion, and other social factors and then show how they are "reflected" in the work.

Another advantage in Burke's approach is that it gives the critic a technique for dealing with literary works where the meaning is not explicit. It is obvious that before one can begin to relate an author's work to any set of social factors he must know what the author is talking about. It is not enough to brush aside "obscure" writers; the very social factors one is seeking to deal with may have been the causes of the obscurity (e.g., sexual themes in Victorian literature). Literary history is full of such incidents for there has never been a time when taboos of one kind or another did not affect the writer. That this censorship may have come in the form of "good taste," custom, or formal censorship matters little for the writer. In any case, he is forced to develop techniques of ambiguity to discuss the things he wants to discuss or not talk about them at all. In this sense, and in Burke's sense, every literary work is some kind of criticism, some type of acceptance, rejection, or doubt about the situation in which it was created. Hence, whether one deals with The Grapes of Wrath or Ulysses, one is dealing with social criticism.⁷²

⁷²For the preceding discussion of Burke's methodology, I have drawn heavily on notes taken in conversation with Hugh Duncan.

Despite Burke's clear statement of methodology, there is still a great deal of confusion surrounding his notion of the "symbolic act." Burke is himself somewhat confusing on this; however, Professor Rueckert clarifies most of the problems associated with the term. There are three general connotations implied in the idea of symbolic action: "linguistic, representative, and purgative-redemptive. The first includes all verbal action; the second covers all acts which are representative of the essential self [i.e., characteristic of the writer]; and the third includes all acts with a purgative-redemptive function."⁷³ The purgative-redemptive aspect of symbolic action is analogous to D. H. Lawrence's idea that writers shed their "sickness" in their books. Since Burke sees man as primarily a moral-ethical animal, he believes that all men are "burdened" with guilt; the writing of a poem functions, then, as a kind of catharsis for the poet (similar to Aristotle's conception, but Burke applies it to the poet as well as the audience). The writer "purges" himself by expressing his guilt; by making his "guilt" public, the poet "socializes" his guilt; this is similar to the effect gained when one confesses to a priest. Burke argues that any symbolic act has all three of these elements; it is linguistic, representative, and purgative-redemptive. In terms of criticism, to study a poem as

⁷³Rueckert, Kenneth Burke, p. 60.

"verbal action" is to take the "intrinsic approach," to study poetry "more or less for its own sake." To approach poetry from the point of view that it is verbal action symbolic of something or that it performs a catharsis function is to take the "extrinsic approach." Burke believes that both are necessary. If the critic concentrates solely on an intrinsic reading, he negates poetry's rhetorical function; if he emphasizes the extrinsic to the exclusion of the intrinsic, then he does not deal with the poetry itself but "reduces" it "to statement, attitude, archetype, or some kind of statistic, and totally disregards what is unique to the literary mode of discourse." The emphasis one adopts will depend on his purpose. Rueckert argues,

The analysis of poetry as symbols in action requires a focus on the techniques of poetry and permits one to do justice to poetry as poetry; the analysis of poetry as verbal action that is symbolic acknowledges the importance of technique (verbal action) but shifts the focus to the content of the symbols; and the analysis of poetry as verbal action that performs a vital function for poet and reader also acknowledges the importance of technique but shifts the focus to the psychological and physical function of the verbal act.⁷⁴

In Burke's own critical practice, the approach is determined by the particular elements in the pentad he is using:

Sometimes Burke seems to take "the substance of the act within itself" and sometimes he seems to take "the substance of a literary act as placed upon a scene" as his generating principle. Actually, however, Burke believes there is no act without a scene [i.e., the scene "contains" the act], and that no analysis of a poem is complete until one

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 64.

has shown how the act functioned in the scene for the agent, or how the act reflects either the scene or the agent or both. Furthermore, Burke maintains that if one takes purpose and function as his generating principle, and approaches "poetry" from the standpoint of situations [scenes] and strategies [acts upon a scene], we can make the most relevant observations about both the content and the form of poems. By starting from a concern with the various tactics and deployments involved in ritualistic acts of membership, purification, and opposition, we can most accurately discover "what is going on in poetry. . . ." Burke causally links problem, solution (or poem), structure, purpose, and function, making the last two pivotal terms. His claim is that "We cannot understand a poem's structure without understanding the function of that structure. And to understand its function, we must understand its purpose."⁷⁵

In Counter-Statement, Burke argues that there "are no forms of art which are not forms of experience outside of art," and one may "discuss the single poem or drama as an individuation of formal principles. Each work re-embodies the formal principles in different subject matter."⁷⁶ What he means is that the materials of art are "psychological universals" (e.g., "crescendo," "contrast," "comparison," "balance," "repetition," "disclosure," "reversal," "contradiction," "expansion," etc.) which are experienced as emotions as they are individuated in specific works. In addition, there are certain "universal patterns" or "potentials"--"speech, material traits (for instance, tools), art, mythology, religion, social

⁷⁵Rueckert, Kenneth Burke, pp. 64-66.

⁷⁶Counter-Statement, p. 143.

systems, property, government, and war"--which man is forever individuating into "specific cultural channels."⁷⁷ Burke defines these "psychological universals" and "universal patterns" as "conditions of appeal" because they are shared by the poet and his audience as part of the psychology of both:

The artist really gets his effects by "manipulating" the "psychology of the audience." He does this by reindividuating the psychological universals in symbols and then ramifying the symbols in a work of art in such a way that the audience is aroused and then gratified by the progression of the work and thus experiences "exultation at the correctness of the procedure". . . . The symbol is a Janus device. Besides serving as an interpretation of a situation, it acts as a vehicle for creating artistic effects, as a technical form. Like the experiential patterns which they embody, symbols can be either simple or complex, and, depending upon certain contingent matters, to varying degrees powerful.⁷⁸

The important thing to note in Burke's discussion of form is that form "is a way of experiencing."⁷⁹ It is not something added on to "content" but the way content is experienced, and it is not peculiar to art. "Form in literature," as Burke defines it, "is an arousing and fulfillment of desires. A work has form in so far as one part of it leads a reader to anticipate another part."⁸⁰ Burke then goes

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 48.

⁷⁸ Rueckert, Kenneth Burke, pp. 18-19.

⁷⁹ Counter-Statement, p. 143; emphasis added.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 124.

on to discuss the five aspects of form:

Progressive form, which is subdivided into

- a) syillogistic progression ". . . the form of a perfectly conducted argument, advancing step by step . . . given certain things, certain things must follow, the premises forcing the conclusions. . . . In so far as the audience, from its acquaintance with the premises, feels the rightness of the conclusion, the work is formal. The arrows of our desires are turned in a certain direction, and the plot follows the direction of the arrows. . . .
- b) qualitative progression ". . . the presence of one quality prepares us for the introduction of another. . . . Such progressions are qualitative rather than syillogistic as they lack the pronounced anticipatory nature of the syillogistic progression. We are prepared less to demand a certain qualitative progression than to recognize its rightness after the event."

Repetitive form ". . . the consistent maintaining of a principle under new guises. It is the restatement of the same thing in a different way. . . . A succession of images, each of them receiving the same lyric mood; a character repeating his identity, his 'number' under changing situations; the sustaining of an attitude, as in satire; the rhythmic regularity of blank verse. . . . Repetitive form, the restatement of a theme by new details, is basic to any work of art, or to any other kind of orientation, for that matter. It is our only method of 'talking on the subject.'"

Conventional form "involves to some degree the appeal of form as form. Progressive, repetitive, and minor forms may be effective even though the reader has no awareness of their formality. But when a form appeals as form, we designate it as conventional form. Any form can become conventional and sought for itself--whether as complex as a Greek tragedy or as compact as a sonnet. . . . We might not, in conventional form, the element of 'categorical expectancy.' That is, whereas the anticipations and gratifications of progressive and repetitive form arise during the process of reading, the expectations of conventional form may be anterior to the reading."

Minor or incidental forms ". . . metaphor, paradox, disclosure, reversal, contraction, expansion, bathos, apostrophe, series, chiasmus--which can be discussed as formal events in themselves."⁸¹

In any work, these forms are interrelated and often in conflict; their "appeal" depends on whether they "gratify" the needs they "create." "The appeal of the form," as Burke says, "is obvious: form is the appeal."⁸² But the forms in art are not solely aesthetic. They must have "a prior existence in the experience of the person hearing or reading the work of art."⁸³ Indeed all experience, as Dewey argues, is only experience (i.e., has meaning) in so far as it has form.

The specific function of art, then, is to incorporate experience into symbols and arrange these symbols into the various forms. Burke believes that all men are "capable of experiencing" certain kinds of "moods, feelings, emotions, perceptions, sensations, and attitudes," for example, "mockery, despair, grimness, sang-froid, wonder, lamentation, melancholy, hatred, hopefulness, bashfulness, relief, boredom, dislike, etc."--these can be experienced by all men. These experiences arise out of man's relation to his environment (natural and

⁸¹Ibid., pp. 124-27.

⁸²Ibid., p. 138.

⁸³Ibid., p. 143.

social), and any "specific environmental condition calls forth and stresses certain of the universal experiences as being more relevant to it, with a slighting of those less relevant. Such selections are 'patterns of experience.' They distinguish us as characters. The protest of Byron, the passive resistance of Gandhi, . . . these are all patterns of experience."⁸⁴ "Patterns of experience" are not necessarily symbolic; there is a difference between having a baby and writing about having a baby. Burke defines a symbol as "the verbal parallel to a pattern of experience." The symbol is an "attitude"; it is a "word invented by the artist to specify a particular grouping or pattern or emphasizing of experiences--and the work of art in which the Symbol figures might be called a definition of this word. The novel, Madame Bovary, is an elaborate definition of a new word in our vocabulary. . . . The Symbol is a formula."⁸⁵ The power of art lies in the nature of this "formulating" aspect of the symbol; the artist uses the symbol in converting "an experiential pattern into a formula for affecting an audience."⁸⁶ (Burke's thinking here is quite close to Caudwell's view of art as the "organization of affects.")

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 151.

⁸⁵ Ibid., pp. 152-53.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 157.

The power of a symbol is enhanced when the writer's and the reader's experience closely overlap; on the other hand, a symbol may function "to force patterns upon an audience" because it has its own "appeal." A symbol appeals in a number of ways; for instance,

- (1) As the interpretation of a situation. It can, by its function as name and definition, give simplicity and order to an otherwise unclarified complexity. It provides a terminology of thoughts, actions, emotions, attitudes, for codifying a pattern of experience.
- (2) By favoring the acceptance of a situation. A humorous symbol enables us to admit the situation by belittling it; a satirical Symbol enables us to admit the situation by permitting us to feel aloof from it; a tragic Symbol enables us to admit the situation by making us feel the dignity of being in such a situation; the comic Symbol enables us to admit the situation by making us feel our power to surmount it. . . .
- (3) As the corrective of a situation. Life in the city arouses a compensatory interest in life on a farm with the result that Symbols of farm life become appealing; or a dull life on the farm arouses a compensatory interest in Symbols depicting a brilliant life in the city. . . .
- (4) As the exercise of "submerged experience" Even those "universal experiences" which the reader's particular patterns of experience happen to slight are in a sense "candidates"--they await with some aggression their chance of being brought into play. Thus though the artist's pattern may be different from the reader's, the Symbol by touching on submerged patterns in the reader may "stir remote depths." Symbols of cruelty, horror and incest may often owe their appeal to such causes.
- (5) As an "emancipator". The situation in which the reader happens to be placed requires of him an adjustment which certain of his moral values prohibit. . . . Accordingly, if some kind of conduct is, by our code of values, called wicked,

absurd, low-caste, wasteful, etc., and if the situation in which we are placed requires this reprehensible kind of conduct, that Symbol will be effective which, by manipulating other values in our code, makes such conduct seem virtuous, discerning, refined, accurate, etc. The appeal of Symbol as "emancipator" involves fundamental shifting of terms in this way: leisure for indolence, foolhardiness for bravery, thrift for miserliness, improvidence for generosity, et cetera or vice versa.

- (6) As a vehicle for "artistic" effects. A Malvolio, a Falstaff, a Coriolanus. To the degree their appeal is in their sheer value as inventions. They are the nimble running of the scales; they display the poet's farthest reaches of virtuosity. . . . Inasmuch as everybody yearns to say one brilliant thing, perhaps this appeal of the Symbol is most poignant of all. . . .⁸⁷

These do not exhaust the appeal of symbols nor are these appeals mutually exclusive. Burke summarizes this list by observing "that the Symbol appeals either as the orienting of a situation, or as the adjustment to a situation, or as both."⁸⁸

I think it would be fair to say that all of Burke's later work is a development of the basic ideas put forward in Counter-Statement. The social function of literature (and all verbal systems) is to orientate the writer and the reader to a particular situation; it is a response to the situation out of which it arose; it is a stylized response. It communicates an attitude and, hence, determines the way in which one acts toward that particular

⁸⁷ Ibid., pp. 153-56.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 156.

situation. Literature can be discussed in terms of "frames of acceptance, rejection or doubt" in response to man's particular situations. It should also be noted that this conception of literature in no way contradicts the Marxist perspective. Indeed, it is perfectly consistent with it. What it does do is to provide the critic with a method of examining the social function of literature in terms of the literature itself. It is not within the scope of this study to examine all the ways in which Burke applies his method in his books and the hundreds of articles and reviews that he has written since 1931. In Attitudes Toward History, Burke examines the major "poetic" categories--epic, tragedy, comedy, humor, the ode, the elegy, satire, burlesque, the grotesque, the didactic, the transcendental, the essay, etc.--to show "each of the great poetic forms stresses its own peculiar way of building the mental equipment (meanings, attitudes, characters) by which one handles the significant factors of his time."⁸⁹ In A Grammar of Motives and Language as Symbolic Action (1966), Burke applies his ideas to the reading of various artists, among whom are included Keats, Dante, Kafka, Yeats, Eliot, Coleridge, E. M. Forster, Roethke, Shakespeare, and Thomas Mann. At the same time he uses the same method noted to discuss every major thinker from Aristotle to Marshall McLuhan. But one of his essays, "On

⁸⁹ Kenneth Burke, Attitudes Toward History, p. 34.

Human Behavior Considered Dramatically" (appended to the 1954 edition of Permanence and Change) is most significant, for in it Burke clearly makes the assertion that the dramatic form as it is manifested in art (particularly the ritual drama of Christianity) is the paradigmatic form of every relationship among men in society and that ritual drama is implicit in the idea of social order.⁹⁰

Like Marx, Burke asserts that human behavior should be considered in the "realm of action and end," in contrast to the "physicist's realm of motion." Man is a creature of praxis, and the best metaphor for discussing action is "dramatistic" in contrast to conceptual schemes that emphasize knowledge and sensory perception. At the same time, Burke also argues that man is "specifically a symbol using animal," and that any "terminology for the discussion of his social behavior must stress symbolism as a motive."⁹¹ This is not to deny the importance of economics; quite the contrary, on a very basic "biological" level, property is absolutely necessary. What happens, however, is that what is a "necessity" becomes a "right" through symbolic transformation and manipulation. (Burke's

⁹⁰ Burke devotes a whole book to these two concepts; see his The Rhetoric of Religion (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961).

⁹¹ Kenneth Burke, "Appendix: On Human Behavior Considered 'Dramatically,'" Permanence and Change, p. 275.

line of reasoning is similar here to Jeremy Bentham's Theory of Fiction.)

Just as Marx argues that there is no such thing as a "natural right" to private property, so Burke argues,

The notion of "rights" in nature is a quasi-naturalistic, metaphysical subterfuge for sanctioning in apparently biological terms a state of affairs that is properly discussed in terms specifically suited to the treatment of symbolism as motive. Jeremy Bentham's juristic critique of language was particularly sharp in helping us to realize that "rights" are not in "nature"; rather, like obligations they are the result of man-made laws, which depend upon the resources of language for their form.⁹²

Burke observes that unfortunately most men do not fully comprehend the function of symbols in determining their notions of private property and capital. With the growth of property "rights," comes the division of labor and the inheritance of property (with its attendant 'rights' and 'obligations'), which in turn give rise to classes. The development of classes is implicit in the idea of private property. Moreover, with the development of classes, there must be some hierarchy among these classes which must be communicated to the members of that particular society. The communication of hierarchy is the basis of social order:

Such "order" is not just "regularity." It also involves a distribution of authority. And such mutuality of rule and service, with its uncertain dividing line between loyalty and servitude, takes

⁹²Ibid., pp. 275-76.

roughly a pyramidal or hierarchical form (or at least it is like a ladder with "up" and "down").⁹³

Owing to the development of classes, there is always an element of "Mystery" in relationships between the classes. People become separated from each other; their world views and their corresponding life styles become more distinct as the classes grow further apart. This "condition of Mystery" is best seen in primitive societies where the priestcraft functions to "promote social cohesion among disparate classes, and in part to perpetuate ways that while favoring some at the expense of the others, may at times endanger the prosperity of the tribe as a whole." In a modern society, with its extremely complex division of labor and "the normal priestly function, of partly upholding and partly transcending the Mysteries of class, is distributed among many kinds of symbol users (particularly educators, legislators, journalists, advertising men, and artists)." The function of the artist is to assist those in power to keep social order. He keeps the "Mystery" alive; he "helps surround a system of social values with 'glamour,' as he finds tricks that transform the austere religious passion into a corresponding romantic, erotic passion."⁹⁴ Or, as Marx would say, the artist's social function is to create

⁹³ Ibid., p. 276.

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 277.

symbols for social mystification to legitimize power and authority. He creates the "master symbols" and the "God terms" which sustain the hierarchy. However, there are other "mysteries" besides the hierarchical mystery implicit in a class structure. Burke explains,

Though we would stress the element of Mystery arising from the social hierarchy, we must recognize that there are other mysteries, other orders. There are the mysteries of dream, of creation, of death, of life's stages, of thought (its arising, its remembering, its disease). There are mysteries of adventure and love. . . . We mention such other sources of mystery to guard against the assumption that we are reducing mystery in general to the social mystery in particular. On the contrary, we are saying: the social mystery gains in depth, persuasiveness, allusiveness and illusiveness precisely by reason of the fact that it becomes inextricably interwoven with mysteries of these other sorts, quite as these other mysteries must in part be perceived through the fog of the social mystery.⁹⁵

Marx says much the same thing when he analyzes ideology. Once a class takes power, the members tend to "universalize" their motives, claiming that they are acting for "all mankind," "liberty," "justice," etc.

Just as "Mystery" is one side of the coin, expressing the antagonism between classes, so the other side is "guilt." Burke says that the easiest way to think about "Guilt" is to examine an "attitude midway between [between Mystery and Guilt]: Embarrassment. The specialist in one field is not 'guilty' with regard to the specialist

⁹⁵ Ibid., pp. 277-78; emphasis added.

in another field; he is embarrassed. He doesn't know exactly how much to question, how much to take on authority, how much to be merely polite about."⁹⁶ The clearest statement of hierarchical embarrassment is found in the religious doctrine of "Original Sin. 'Original Sin' is categorical guilt, one's 'guilty' not as the result of any personal transgression, but by reason of tribal or dynastic inheritance" (e.g., man born in sin because of the Fall).⁹⁷ The crux of the matter is that all men are born into a society in which they are assigned roles which they did not choose; this would hold for a communist society as well as it does for a capitalist one. Burke says,

We take it for granted that the pyramidal magic is inevitable in social relations, whereby individuals, whether rightly or wrongly, become endowed with the attributes of their office. "Private property" may change its name and its nature; and surely it can be so modified that it becomes a better fit for a given social institution than it might be otherwise. But whatever name it may go by, even if its name be "no property," it must exist in function insofar as a certain cluster of expectancies, rights, material rewards, honors, and the like is normal to such-and-such a person, as distinct from all other persons, who carries out certain responsibilities or obligations duly recognized as such in his society.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Permanence and Change, p. 278.

⁹⁷ Burke, loc. cit.

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 279.

With the office come certain ways of doing things, "propriety," "good form," "in the 'proper order,'" etc. There is always the danger that we are not playing our role correctly (either from our own point of view or from society's point of view, or both); no one is perfect. Guilt is built into the social order, any social order.

But any social order must find a way to expiate guilt. Burke quotes from Coleridge's Aids to Reflexion: "The two great moments of the Christian Religion are, Original Sin and Redemption; that the ground, this the superstructure of our faith."⁹⁹ Burke argues that one must examine the ways in which this theological conception finds its "possible secular equivalent":

Basically, the pattern proclaims a principle of absolute "guilt," matched by a principle that is designed for the corresponding absolute cancellation of such guilt. And this cancellation is contrived by victimage, by the choice of the sacrificial offering that is correspondingly absolute in the perfection of its fitness. We assume that, insofar as the "guilt" were but "fragmentary," a victim correspondingly "fragmentary" would be adequate for the redeeming of such a debt, except insofar as "fragmentation" itself becomes an absolute condition.

In brief, given "original sin," (tribal or "inherited" guilt), it follows by the ultimate logic of symbols, that the compensatory sacrifice of a ritually perfect victim should be the corresponding "norm." Hence, insofar as the religious pattern (of "original sin" and sacrificial redeemer) is adequate to the "cathartic" needs of a human hierarchy (with modes of mystery appropriate to such a hierarchy) it would follow that the

⁹⁹ Permanence and Change, p. 283.

promoting of social cohesion through victimage is "normal" and "natural."¹⁰⁰

Burke examines Greek Tragedy in which "civic tensions (tensions that, in the last analysis, are always referrible to problems of property)" are resolved in "catharsis" and notes that in tragedy as well as comedy the "catharsis" "(a stylistic cleansing of the audience)" comes through victimage. Burke then asks a very important question:

. . . considering both the rationale behind the doctrinal placement of the Crucifixion and the pattern of Greek tragedy . . . we began to ask how profound the motive of victimage might be. That is: insofar as all complex social order will necessarily be grounded in some kind of property structure, and insofar as all such order in its devisive aspects makes for the kind of social malaise which theologians would explain in terms of "original sin," is it possible that rituals of victimage are the "natural" means of affirming the principle of social cohesion above the principle of social division?¹⁰¹

The answer is yes. Social order is achieved through victimage, the either real or symbolic killing-off of the scapegoat, as when Hitler "victimized" the Jews and "re-deemed" Germany, or, on a more trivial level, when the town marshall shoots the bank robber in the name of justice (for justice can be an "ultimate" term in the hierarchy). Or one may even discuss "mortification" as a form of self-victimage. Burke's major point is "that 'order' as such makes for a tangle of guilt, mystery, ambition

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., pp. 283-84; emphasis added.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., pp. 285-86.

('adventure') and vindication that infuses even the most visible and tangible of material 'things' with the spirit of the order through which it is perceived."¹⁰² Hence, there is a constant drive to find the "perfect" victim. Burke warns that it is necessary to always be critical, to be on the lookout for the attempt to promote social cohesion through "mystification." But this is very difficult because of the tendency of symbols to become refined in discourse, i.e., to reach "ultimates" or "universals," and the tendency of hierarchical expression to perfect itself by relating rank and grade to a procession toward some kind of godhead (i.e., "master symbol" "God term" "ruling idea") which ends in a moment of mystery seems indigenous to every kind of social order.

Burke, then, provides a way to think about the specific social function of art. In his article for Modern Sociological Theory, Hugh Duncan sums up Burke's contribution to this particular area of study:

The specific societal function of art, in his view [Burke's], is to create and sustain social hierarchies through the legitimation of various powers. Burke's view seems very close to Weber's but Burke shows how legitimation occurs in symbolic action. This is done by glamourizing symbols that transcend conflict by appeals to "higher" powers; that is, to symbols that the artist and his society charge with that highly sacred aura, the power of the group itself. Art must be analyzed in terms of what dramatic struggle goes on [e.g., ritual

¹⁰²Ibid., p. 288.

dramal, under what conditions, by what means, between what kinds of actors, in what kinds of actions, and for what purpose. This is done by showing how in the form and content of the art work itself, values held inimical to the survival of society are destroyed, as in the symbolic killing of the villain; how values held necessary to the survival of the group are preserved or brought into being, as in the symbolic birth, rebirth, or victory of the hero. Symbols of passage from birth to rebirth, from social defeat to victory, from the old to the new self make social change possible. The artist keeps paths to change open through the creation of ambiguous, playful, or comic symbols that enable us to experiment in symbolic action with attitudes before we must realize them in the irrevocable moments of completed acts.¹⁰³

From Burke's perspective, then, art is a form of symbolic action; in its social function, it is concerned with motives of guilt, redemption, hierarchy and victimage. The structure of this act can be determined by discovering what kind of act it is, who performed it, through what means or instruments, and for what purposes (i.e., Burke's "pentad": Act, Scene, Agent, Agency, Purpose). The structure of the act and the structure of art is dramatic, and the function of that structure is the expression of authority for social order. This is perfectly consistent with Marxism and Marx's conception of the structure of art as "conflict," and its function in ideology.

Hugh Duncan spent a large portion of his academic life criticizing, developing, and working out the

¹⁰³Hugh Dalziel Duncan, "Sociology of Art, Literature and Music: Social Contexts of Symbolic Experience," in Modern Sociological Theory: In Continuity and Change, Howard Becker and Alvin Boskoff (New York: The Dryden Press, 1957), p. 491.

implications of these ideas. In Duncan's work, art is one form of social integration; it shares its functions with the institutions of the family, the government, economic institutions, defense institutions, education, entertainment, health, sociality (dress, manners, clothes, etc.), and religion. All of these institutions create and sustain roles that man must adopt in order to function successfully in society, and art is vitally important because it perfects the forms by which society communicates these roles.

In all of his major works, Language and Literature in Society (1953), Communication and Social Order (1962), Culture and Democracy (1964), Symbols in Society (1968), and Symbols and Social Theory (1969), Duncan is searching for methods to think about the relationship between art and society. All of his work is significant to any critic, Marxist or otherwise, who is seeking to develop a theory defining the social function of literature. Again, it is not within the scope of this study to examine Duncan's sociology of literature. What I would like to do, however, is to point up some of the areas that Duncan has worked in and some of the issues that are particularly pertinent to a Marxist perspective, areas and issues that Marxism could find useful but which, for the most part, have been ignored by practically all Marxist critics. Just as Burke offers a method for interpreting literature,

in light of its social function, Duncan also furnishes clues for the critic. My intention is not to assert that Duncan's approach is the scheme that one ought to adopt; at most, I am suggesting that these are issues that Marxists should confront.¹⁰⁴

Like Burke, Duncan believes that an understanding of the symbolic act is basic in attempting to interpret human relations and the function of literature in society. In laying the groundwork for this perspective, Duncan takes up the problem of "reflection." His discussion is significant because the problem of reflection is central to all previous Marxist interpretations of art (except William Morris'). Most simply stated the problem is this: What is it that a symbol "reflects" or denotes? Duncan takes issue with Joyce Hertzler's assertion that symbols "are the instrumentalities whereby men codify experience, or create a 'map' of the territory of experience."¹⁰⁵ Duncan asks, "How do we 'bestow' meaning, or 'codify' experience, or create a 'map' if not through symbols? And if symbols function just as a 'carrier of meaning' and the source of meaning is not symbolic, just

¹⁰⁴Most of my discussion of Duncan's work is drawn from his Language and Literature in Society and Symbols in Society, the former because it concentrates on literature and the latter because it seems to be the most succinct statement of his general theory.

¹⁰⁵Joyce O. Hertzler, A Sociology of Language (New York: Ransom House, 1965), p. 29.

what is the source of meaning?"¹⁰⁶ This does not mean that an "event, such as making love," can be explained as "symbolic," but on the other hand "neither can we explain the human experience of love by sexual 'drive.' Love is both: it is sex and symbol."¹⁰⁷ Or, forgetting Freud for a moment, one could ask a Marxist why Marx found it necessary to discuss money and commodities in terms of religious imagery or images drawn from Shakespeare (e.g., where Marx uses Shakespeare's Timon of Athens in Capital)?

Relationships between symbol and event are determined by what we are trying to do, and how we do it. And since both what and how take place in communication, the data of communication are prime social data. In human relationships "relatedness" is the kind of relatedness we experience in communication. Man is a trader, as he is a politician, parent, child, or worshipper of supernatural forces, but in all his roles he is a communicator. As businessman, parent, soldier, lover, artist, scientist, priest, he communicates, and how he communicates, the forms in which he enacts these roles, determines success or failure in them. In sum, if needs, wants, desires--religious, economic, political, sexual, as the case may be--are to be accepted as motives for conduct, how we communicate these motives must be studied.¹⁰⁸

Even if Marxists take a symbolic act as pure propaganda, they have a difficult time dealing with it because they have not developed any methods for studying it.

¹⁰⁶ Hugh Dalziel Duncan, Symbols in Society (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), pp. 6-7.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 7.

¹⁰⁸ Duncan, loc. cit.

Despite Marx's insistence on man as a creature of praxis and his dramatic vision of social action as well as his conception of ideology as an act by which one class legitimizes and sustains its power, most European thinkers treat culture and art as epistemological systems (how one "knows" the world). Huizinga's The Waning of the Middle Ages, Burckhardt's Renaissance studies, the work of Cassirer and Lukács tend to use art as a way of interpreting society. Hence, with Marxists at least, there is always the problem of deciding whether art is giving a "true" picture of society. For instance, even in his best work, such as The Historical Novel, Lukács is constantly judging whether or not a writer is giving a "true" insight into "reality." This leads into all kinds of endless debates concerning "realism" versus "naturalism" or the problem of "tendentious" literature. Examining Marx's attempt to justify his love for Greek literature or Engels' comments on Balzac, one realizes that they too were troubled by these problems. The problem of reflection cannot be dismissed, but to focus on it exclusively is to limit the scope and potential of Marxism as a rich source of other fruitful ideas. By contrast, with Burke and Duncan (as well as many of the American pragmatists) art, science, religion, and philosophy are treated as systems of action; the problem is not so much how one "knows" the world but how one "acts" in the world. As

Marx insisted, "truth" is discovered in praxis.

Consequently, the symbolic act insofar as it is social, is not a way of apprehending the world but "an act of identification with good, dubious, or bad principles of social order. The structure of such actions are dramatic, but from a sociological point of view the function of this drama is the creation and sustainment of social order. This involves a concept of style as identification:

Style, how we express ourselves, is an identification with a social order. Such identifications are both positive and negative. As we respond to the manners of others we are aware that they have not acted improperly as well as that they have acted properly. Often, indeed, we honor people for what they have not done. Purity may be born of innocence (the "pure in heart") but it is preserved in struggles against the temptations of impurity.¹⁰⁹

Like Burke, Duncan sees a correlation between drama of art and the drama of life in the creation of social order.

Principles of social order are kept alive in the glory of roles we use to sustain positions of superiority, inferiority, and equality in social position. So long as we believe that individuals err but that certain kinds of hierarchical roles are necessary to social order, there will be order.

.....
 Symbols reach their highest state of power in struggles between good and bad principles of social order as personified in heroes and villains, Gods and devils, allies and enemies, and the like. As we say in vulgar American, the "good guys" and the "bad guys" must "shoot it out." The "bad guy" is called various things. In art he is the villain; in government, the enemy (within and without); in religion, the devil; in democratic debate, the "loyal opposition." But in the most profound and moving

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., pp. 22-23.

dramas of social life the "bad guy" is transformed into a victim whose suffering and death purges the social order. In art this is called "catharsis," in religion "purification". . . .

Symbols are kept pure through victimage or sacrifice. The pure symbol is used as an intermediary between the sacrifice (the hero), the person or thing which is to be socialized in the sacrifice, and the sacred principle of order to whom the sacrifice is addressed. Thus, all social order depends on consecration through communication, . . . through naming, and as our generation knows only too well, much blood is spilt in our world over the control of names. Names must be kept holy, sacred, honorable, dignified, proper; for if they are not, we cannot apply them to ways in which we relate and create order in society.¹¹⁰

But there is another kind of "purification" besides tragic victimage, and this occurs in comedy. The comic victim is still a "victim," but in laughing at him we also laugh at ourselves.

In his degradation and suffering we confront the many incongruities that beset us as we try to live together in love and hate. Unlike the tragic victim, who puts us in communication with supernatural power capable of great evil as well as good, the comic victim keeps us within the world. We talk to each other, not to our gods, about the social ills that beset us. In doing so we bring into consciousness the hidden and dark mysteries of supernatural realms. Consciousness rises in discussion. When talk is free, informed, public, there is hope of correcting our social ills because in such talk reason can bring to light much that is hidden in the dark majesty of tragedy.¹¹¹

These are some of the major tenants of Duncan's theory of the social function of symbols. In Symbols in Society, he creates twelve "axiomatic propositions," twenty-four "theoretical propositions," and thirty-five

¹¹⁰Ibid., pp. 23-24. ¹¹¹Ibid., pp. 24-25.

"methodological propositions," which form the basis of this thinking about the social functions of symbols. It is not necessary to review them here; however, in order to understand Duncan's specific comments on the social function of literature, a knowledge of his assumptions is helpful. I will simply list his "axiomatic propositions."

1. Society arises in, and continues to exist through, the communication of significant symbols.
2. Man creates the significant symbols he uses in communication.
3. Emotions, as well as thought and will, are learned in communication.
4. Symbols affect social motives by determining the forms in which the contents of relationships can be expressed.
5. From a sociological point of view motives must be understood as man's need for social relationships.
6. Symbols are directly observable data of meaning in social relationships.
7. Social order is expressed through hierarchies which differentiate men into ranks, classes, and status groups, and at the same time, resolve differentiation through appeals to principles or order which transcend those upon which differentiation is based.
8. Hierarchy is expressed through the symbolization of superiority, inferiority, and equality, and of passage from one to the other.
9. Hierarchy functions through persuasion, which takes the form of courtship in social relations.
10. The expression of hierarchy is best conceived through forms of drama which are both comic and tragic.

11. Social order is created and sustained in social dramas through intensive and frequent communal presentations of tragic and comic roles whose proper enactment is believed necessary to community survival.
12. Social order is always a resolution of acceptance, doubt, or rejection of the principles that are believed to guarantee such order.¹¹²

In Language and Literature in Society, Duncan is concerned with the function of literature as "great art," as "magic art," and "make-believe." His basic thesis is that literature communicates and perfects the roles necessary for social order. However, before proceeding into his discussion it is necessary to recall three of the distinctions that Marx makes between animals and man. It is these definitions, in which Marx relates art to man's praxis, that put Marx squarely in the camp of Duncan and Burke. First, Marx assumes a theory of imagination. Before the architect builds his house he "raises his structure in imagination before he erects it in reality. At the end of every labour process, we get a result that already existed in the imagination of the labourer at its commencement."¹¹³ Second, while animals construct only for the needs of the species to which they belong, "man knows how to produce in accordance with the standards of every species and knows how to apply the appropriate standard to the object. Thus man constructs also in

¹¹²Ibid., pp. xi-xiii.

¹¹³Marx, Capital, I, 78.

accordance with the laws of beauty."¹¹⁴ Third, and most important, an animal does not distinguish its life activity from itself, "but man makes his life activity itself an object of his will and consciousness."¹¹⁵ Man's life activity is his praxis; it is his social action. Through language, man, with his imagination, makes his own actions the object of "his will and consciousness." These he objectifies in symbolic structures, one of which is literature. It is not some sort of "objective reality" that is the object of his consciousness, but his actions. Thus, when the Marxist philosopher, Ernst Bloch, writes that "art is at one and the same time a laboratory and a carnival of possibilities brought to fulfillment,"¹¹⁶ he might be more accurate in saying that it is a laboratory and a carnival of the possibilities of human action brought to fulfillment. Marx keeps insisting over and over again that it is not consciousness that determines existence but existence that determines consciousness, and for Marx the fundamental fact of existence is action.

If one accepts Marx's definitions, then Duncan's discussion of the social function of literature offers no difficulties, for according to him "great literature is the conscious exploration through the imagination of the

¹¹⁴ Marx, Early Writings, p. 128.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p. 127.

¹¹⁶ Cited in Jameson, Marxism and Form, p. 150.

possibilities of human action in society. It is a form of imagery, an object created by the author, which we (reader and author) use during the symbolic phase of action. In great literature the symbolic act of expressing emotion consciously is a directed process, an effort directed toward a certain end, for which appropriate means can be determined in the light of its special character."¹¹⁷ This seems perfectly consistent with Marx's position. Whatever his political persuasion, the writer depicts "ways of acting, not simply ways of 'thinking,' 'reflecting,' 'witnessing,' or 'making believe'."¹¹⁸

Moreover, like the Marxists, Duncan sees art as primarily a social act, not only because of the social nature of language but because the artist must have an audience.

When an author desires to arouse or to dissipate a certain emotion in his audience, he must know the public he is addressing. He must know what kind of stimulus will produce what kind of response. He must adapt his language to his public, to make sure that it contains stimuli appropriate to their peculiarities. But if he wishes to express his emotions and if he cannot find them already expressed in the literary traditions of his society, the author must express his emotions in such a way to make them intelligible to himself. He does not do this alone. He shares his explorations with his public, since it is in his relations with them that he first becomes aware, and then deepens his awareness, of the

¹¹⁷Language and Literature, p. 3.

¹¹⁸Ibid., p. 4.

problems that he is trying to clarify through expression.¹¹⁹

Duncan is drawing on Mead and Burke for his argument, but his point has particular relevance for Marxists. What happens to audiences in a class society: How can an author "know the public he is addressing" if he is writing for an impersonal market?

Like the Marxists examined in this study, Duncan is trying to "demystify" the role of the artist. In attempting to clarify his emotions, the writer is simply behaving like other men. It is not the writer that invents social problems; he does not "invent" racism, but "the writer and the writer's public, through the medium of his work, share in the exploration of the problems arising out of our racial attitudes, as these problems manifest themselves in concrete human actions." Nor is the writer particularly concerned with description or analysis of the race problem but "with exploring through imagination (and expressing in imagery) what happens to people when they live in a state of prejudice." The writer's public "shares this exploration with the writer, because each is concerned with the same problem, namely how to act in his role as Negro or as white in specific social situations."¹²⁰ The difference between the writer

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p. 3.

¹²⁰ Language and Literature, pp. 3-4.

and his public is only a matter of "degree" not kind:

In such a matter as relations between Negro and white in our society, we ask the writer to express emotions and thoughts so that in reading his work we can express our thoughts and emotions. That is, I (as reader) turn to Richard Wright's work on the Negro in America, because I am concerned about the problem. On the level of this symbolic act, there is no distinction of kind between myself and Richard Wright. There is, however, a difference of degree. The author's difference from his audience is based in the fact that, though both do exactly the same thing, namely attempt to express a particular emotion in particular words, the author is one who can solve for himself the problem of expressing it, whereas the audience can express it only when the author has shown them how. The author is not unique in having an emotion, he is unique in his ability to take the initiative in expressing what all feel but what the author alone can bring to some kind of form which "clarifies" what is felt.¹²¹

As William Morris said, "Many people think as deeply and as beautifully as poets do, it may be more so, but yet are not poets; their feelings do not come to the point of expression."¹²² And, as Duncan argues, a "feeling cannot become an emotion until it is expressed, and this expression cannot have meaning until we react to this expression with others whose responses are significant to us."¹²³

What makes the writer different is that he can give a verbal parallel to a pattern of experience in consensually validated symbols which may be experienced by anyone who

¹²¹ Ibid., pp. 4-5.

¹²² William Morris, "Letter to Fred Henderson (19 October 1885)," in E. P. Thompson, William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary, p. 876.

¹²³ Language and Literature, p. 9.

reads his work. The symbols are meaningful and intensely emotional because the situations in which this meaning was created was common (i.e., "universal" in Burke's terminology), to the writer and his audience.

From Duncan's point of view, in any social order, communistic as well as capitalistic, men must know how to act; they must know what roles they are to play and these roles must be public. They must also know what roles other people play in order to relate to them. Social order rests on the communication of roles by which people relate as superiors, inferiors and equals. Marx, Engels, and their followers have not paid much attention to this aspect of social relationships, but it is obvious that Marx certainly had some ideas about what "role" the capitalist plays, and he created the role of the revolutionary proletariat. Furthermore, it is apparent that before one can be a revolutionary, one must know what a "revolutionary" means and what is involved in the act of revolution. Duncan observes that "within every institution" there are "three basic phases of role-taking [which] may be distinguished. We act in terms of tradition, as solvers of problems or as creators of ideals." That is to say, one performs an action because that is the way it has been done in the past, because it is the best solution to the problem in light of present knowledge, or because acting this particular way conforms to an

"ideal" of proper action. Consequently, "edenic" novels, socialist realism, or utopian novels may all be used to organize action in the present. Which phase of role-taking will be emphasized by writers "will be determined by the institutions which control commemoration, prophecy, or problem solving and what power literary institutions have." The critic, then, should determine the institutions which control time; what institutions control the past, present and future? What phases of role-taking are being emphasized, by whom, by what means, for what purpose?

As for the roles themselves, society and every institution in society wants its members to fight, marry, reproduce, die, etc., in specific ways. These modes of living can be called "styles" or "forms," and, Duncan argues, "they are taught us in modern society largely through literary depictions," which "unlike religion or science," are "concerned with the understanding of human actions as these occur in society." There are at least three types of role created in literature: "Literature depicts what is assumed to be true of human actions generally, what is true of action in a specific class or institution, or what is true of individual action."¹²⁴ The heroes of myth and folklore are characteristic of

¹²⁴Ibid., p. 14.

the first type; they are universal characters of any one society. The English squire, and the "beatnik" are examples of the second type. The third type

. . . are presented as bearers of the problems of society. They are assigned the role of trying to act where action is highly problematic, where doubt, reason, intense questioning, and self-searching are common. The search for ways to act successfully, for ends which can be accepted, dominate action. The general and specific literary type does not question the ends of his society, but how to overcome obstacles in the achievement of these ends. That, for example, one should be a brave soldier is not the problem for the general or specific type, but how one can become the brave soldier. To the individual type neither the end of action nor the means is clear. The individual searches for some resolution. Often he fails, but his function, even in failure, is to offer depictions of "proper" attempts to integrate actions. Hamlet, Werther, and Faust are legends of a search. Here is not Pilgrim's progress to Christian salvation, but a new man, modern man who will live with a new faith, the faith in reason, whose search is for a truth based in reason.¹²⁵

Further, a critic can obtain important clues as to the social function of literature if he is able to discover not only what types of roles are being depicted but what roles are being "glamourized," and degraded. Who are the villains, heroes and fools?

Besides depicting roles, literature organizes time in action. In the discussion of Talcott Parsons' definition of the structure of the "unit act," it was noted that his conception of the act implied a goal. Similarly, before Marx's architect could build his house,

¹²⁵ Ibid., pp. 14-15.

he had to imagine its completed form in the future. The future is implicit in action, "for an image of a future is preparation for action, and it is the unique function of literature to imagine the future in terms of how it can help us act in the present." As George Herbert Mead observes, the locus of reality is in the present; the future and the past exist only in symbols. However, we must organize the past and the future in order to act in the present. According to Duncan,

Literary pasts and futures are simply aspects of the present within which we act out fully the possibilities of action through symbolic action. Every form of action makes use of ideals, as fictions in science, heavens in religion, utopias in politics, or completely fulfilling acts in art [i.e., Mead's "consummatory moment"]. We assume various purposes for action which we present as futures, visions, and prophecies, and thus create a means, a model, a standard, by which we determine the efficacy of present action. The stretch of the present within which self-consciousness functions is delimited by the particular social act in which we are engaged. Once this stretches beyond immediate perception, we fill it out with memories and imagination.¹²⁶

The creation of literary pasts and futures presupposes a theory of imagination. For Duncan, the imagination is "the specific means by which the symbolic phases of literary action helps us to enact our roles in society. . . . the symbolic is as much a phase of action as is desire or reason or any motor phase of the act. Imagination is an exploratory phase." Imagination functions in

¹²⁶ Language and Literature, pp. 15-16.

scientific activity as well as in religion and art. Systems design, scientific fictions, theories, hypotheses, models--all are imaginative constructs. But when imagination is "considered in terms of its cultural function, we refer to it in terms not of thought but of feeling, sentiment, or emotion." In the symbolic phase of the act, imagination is used to transform "raw feelings into an emotion which is related to thought as well as feeling." This, in part, accounts for the aesthetic experience:

The profound integration we experience in aesthetic expression is the result of a new integration which emotion (as consciously expressed in aesthetic form) and thought receive in being expressed. The somatic activity which is stimulated by a given emotion is converted into controlled activity, once it takes place in forms which are communicable and hence objectified. . . . Literary expression in particular and language in general, as imaginative experiences, are distinct from simple somatic experience, not because they involve nothing somatic but because none of these elements survives in a raw state. . . . What is observable in this process is not "biological drives" (at least not as data) but a system of symbolic presentations of actions which people use to express, love, hate, or fear.¹²⁷

This "conversion of feeling into values" is one of the basic functions of literature. The imaginative phase of action which one experiences in literature is grounded in "crude emotions," but these emotions are transformed into "imaginative actions" which are then assimilated into experience, "which, as a whole as generated and presided over by consciousness, is a rational, although

¹²⁷ Ibid., pp. 16-17.

imaginative experience. Only as we express emotions through various symbols supplied to us by artists can we know them as social."¹²⁸ And only as we know emotions as social do we know what they mean. The writer is able to depict the meaning of roles and hence, the reader is able to take the role of the other which is necessary for the creation of self. Thus, Marx says: "In my production I would have objectified my individuality and its particularity, and, . . . I would have been the mediator between you and the species and you would have experienced me as a reintegration of your own nature and a necessary part of our self; . . . I would have directly created your life. . . ."¹²⁹ Like Marx, Duncan believes that literature makes it possible for one to objectify subjective aspects of the self (for the writer and the reader). In literature we experience the "other," and as Mead points out, we need the other in order for the self to arise. We are able to take the attitude of the other (as we do in play, games and drama) because the literary work "has been validated by the consensus of the group." And, as Duncan explains:

This reflexive quality of literary symbols indicates how it is possible for us to experience such emotions as pride, humility, envy, shame, love,

¹²⁸Ibid., p. 17.

¹²⁹Marx, "Feuerbachian Criticism of Hegel," Easton and Guddat, p. 281.

or hate. These organized attitudes which we arouse in ourselves when we write occur within the inner drama of consciousness. But our self arises in this drama just so far as we can take the attitudes of others toward ourselves and respond to these attitudes. When we approve or condemn ourselves, we do so because we assume the generalized attitude of the group; but we know that the group approves and condemns because it has a system of symbolic characters and actions within which praise and blame are given form in symbolic action, not simply as "qualities" or "judgements."¹³⁰

We never see "individuals"; we see persons (derived from the theater, persona is a mask), and the concept of persons is inseparable from that of role. The "self" is a complex of roles, which, for the most part, are waiting for man in society before he is born and which must be socially sustained and relatively stable. In primitive societies man learns his roles in face-to-face situations, but in modern society this is not possible. Consequently, any "self, to become a self in modern society, must use literary symbols, for in our society every important action is distributed among a number of individuals; and, as our society becomes more complex, there is a wider distribution of roles, as well as a greater specialization in roles. Literary communication, the fixing of a set of significant symbols which will have common meanings, is one of our most important ways of achieving consensus."¹³¹ This is the function of "great" literature, to explore the meaning of action as an enactment of roles believed to be

¹³⁰ Language and Literature, p. 17.

¹³¹ Ibid., p. 18.

necessary to sustain social order. (This does not mean, of course, that the writer accepts the existing order; in rejecting the existing order he posits a counter-order. However, he must still believe that the proper enactment of roles will guarantee that counter-order.)

In contrast with "great" literature, when literature is used as "magic," the "ends" of action are not open to question. Literature becomes an instrument the purpose of which "is to inspire us to practical actions held desirable within the institutions controlling society."¹³² This is what Caudwell describes as the function of poetry in primitive tribes. In a Horatio Alger novel the value of success is never questioned; what one experiences is what it "feels like" to be successful. The only problem is how to become rich and successful.

Like prayers for rain, "pep" talks, exhortations to dice in gambling, or use of love charms, magical literature is used when we do not know how to obtain desired effects through other means. If we know how to get rain, we would not pray, just as we do not pray for the success of a mathematical formula. When we pray for rain, we do not necessarily produce rain, but we are able to go into the fields and work with better heart before prayer. . . . As I read a success story, I become charged with greater courage, faith and hope for success, because as I read, far from escaping competition, I compete on a symbolic level under conditions where ends of competition are clear, rules are implicitly accepted by everyone, and, above all, people do become successful when they act in terms of these rules.¹³³

¹³²Ibid., p. 20.

¹³³Ibid., p. 21.

Magic art girds us with the strength to act. The magical artist serves as a kind of community cheerleader who helps the community struggle with forces that are very powerful. Through magic, he helps us to gain confidence to satisfy basic needs--hunger, sex, status, etc.--; these needs are not in question; the only problem is how to satisfy them. To make successful appeals, magic must "destroy old beliefs, offer us passage from old to new, and finally replace the old with the new. We do the first through symbolic process of 'desanctification,' the second by breaking down fixities in meaning through metaphor, and the third by sanctifying symbols charged with new values."¹³⁴ Through "mockery, raillery, derision, and scorn," magic art transforms powerful forces into manageable obstacles, for, as Duncan observes, "we cannot struggle against forces we think sublime. . . . For man to contest with a god, he must be raised to godliness [e.g., through boasting], or the god must be degraded to a man."¹³⁵ This is the function of magic.

It is also in magic art that the ritualistic act of victimage takes place. Magic art heaps scorn and ridicule on the victim to prepare him for sacrifice (either real or symbolic). The important thing to remember, as Duncan reminds us, is that "in magic art we do

¹³⁴Ibid., p. 23.

¹³⁵Duncan, loc. cit.

not hate and then ridicule, we ridicule so we can hate. If such laughter is not checked by reason operating through imagination, as in great art, the butt of ridicule soon becomes the scapegoat, whom we torture and kill for our edification."¹³⁶

Like Malinowski, Duncan believes that the greatest magic artists in modern societies are advertising men (followed closely by politicians). Business employs the artist to create and perpetuate proper forms of spending for fashion, food, transportation, housing, etc. Spending is linked to other highly charged symbols such as religion and status. Easter Sunday becomes a fashion parade and Thanksgiving becomes an orgy of eating. Money itself becomes a symbol of status and glamour.

Our magical art places no inhibition on spending. Everyone (even the child) is urged to buy. Everything is arranged for sale. Even status insignias can be rented, not as for a masquerade, but for actual use in public. Formal dress clothes, expensive cars, all the trappings of plutocratic status, even escorts trained in bourgeois social graces (where to spend for what effect), are available at various levels of sophistication--and rental.¹³⁷

However, magic must not be thought of as an "escape" or as something that modern man no longer needs. There is "white" magic as well as black magic, and if for no other reason all societies must make use of magic "to inspire

¹³⁶ Ibid., p. 25.

¹³⁷ Ibid., p. 34.

us to endure hardships attendant upon status struggles."¹³⁸

In contrast to great art and magic art, the function of make-believe art is to "remove us from action by dissipating emotions which, if developed into action (as in the use of magical art) or into conscious, rational experience (as in the use of great art), would be a threat to those in control."¹³⁹ There is a whole body of literature--comic books, fairy tales, horror stories, "true" confessions, crime novels, etc.--where our most secret and deepest desires are given public and traditional forms of expression. In using this literature the public is "making use of forms of expression which are approved by their society and which are one means by which they learn to satisfy their instinctual drives." In make-believe literature one can do what he pleases; there are no-holds barred because everyone agrees that it is not "real" life; one will not act on what he reads. At the same time make-believe literature is shared, community experience.

Unlike the dream which is "mine" or the sense of guilt which "I alone" endure, make-believe literature is shared by members of a community who can imagine and know what each is experiencing because they make use of commonly understood symbols. These systems of make-believe are one kind of collective sentiments which become established as symbols and myths because the situations in which they are used recur. As long as we cannot satisfy

¹³⁸ Ibid., p. 40.

¹³⁹ Ibid., p. 42.

our sex needs as we do our hunger, we need some sort of sexual "wishbook."¹⁴⁰

Any institution seeking power in society must create symbols for "relieving people of these states, when it cannot prevent them from developing." This has been the historic role of make-believe art. In any situation where one's deepest passions cannot be expressed in action because of some social taboo, make-believe literature will be powerful, for it is the "expressive function of make-believe literature which gives it power over us."¹⁴¹

Summing up his views on these three different types of literature and the distinction between literary action and other kinds of action. Duncan observes:

Literary artists develop new forms of expression, which allows us to act in a present; preserve linguistic conventions and traditions, which allows us to commemorate individual and communal aspects of our past; and envision futures, wherein actions, now painful or terrible, become beautiful and sublime. All this is possible because the artist experiments with symbols to discover their ultimate possibilities in expression. This is the basis of the power of men of letters, and, if religion must be studied in terms of ritual, literature must be studied in terms of language as symbolic action. The realities of life (birth, suffering, and death) are not merely symbolic experiences (any more than they are simply "material events"); they are both material and symbolic. If symbolic expression is so much a part of culture and if we accept literature as a social institution which is concerned with the conservation, efficiency, and invention of symbols not as a means of "knowing" or "believing" but

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 43.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., pp. 45, 49.

as a means of acting, sociologists must reflect on the social organization of those who are so skilled in the creation of the new, and the refinement of old, systems of verbal expression.¹⁴²

If this is a task for the sociologists, then it is also a task for the Marxist critic. Besides distinguishing between three types of literature in terms of their functions, Duncan also examines the function of literature as a social institution and the role of the critic. Marxists have not begun to scratch the surface of these areas (as was noted, however, Marx had many ideas about the function and place of the critic). There is no reason why they cannot do so. There is nothing in either Burke's or Duncan's work that is not amenable to a Marxist perspective. Further, a Marxist critic can extend both Burke's and Duncan's conceptual systems by putting them in a historical perspective. These ideas need to be examined in light of concrete, historical situations, in the works of specific authors writing for well-defined publics. Indeed, it is clear as one reads Burke and Duncan that their major weakness is this lack of historical perspective and specificity, and this is where a Marxist critic could add an enormous amount of additional insight. Both Kenneth Burke and Hugh Duncan claim that their work is primarily concerned with methodology. It is now time

¹⁴²Ibid., p. 74.

for the application of the methods. Using Burke and Duncan, the critic can not only demonstrate how literature is functioning in society but he can also demonstrate how he knows what he says he knows in the literature itself. Furthermore, it is now the moment for the Marxist critic to stop explaining how much "truth" is "reflected" in literature and get on with the job of demonstrating what literature does to people, how it determines social action and social order. If the communication of symbols is the key to social order (and change), if symbols are motives, then it is reasonable to assume that before one can change the social order in the direction he desires, it is necessary to understand the way in which symbols function. Marx began this work with his studies of ideology, mystification, and the way in which people use art "forms" in revolutionary situations (e.g., his remarks on the bourgeois use of classical forms during the French Revolution). However, neither he nor Engels developed any systematic theory of communication, even though art was for them a primary category of social experience. It seems to me that this is the pressing task of contemporary Marxist criticism.

What I am calling for in literary criticism is something on the order of what men such as James Peacock are doing for anthropology. Using concepts and methods drawn from Kenneth Burke as well as cultural anthropologists,

Peacock demonstrates clearly how in Javanese society, ludruk, a secular proletarian drama, "helps persons symbolically define their movements from one type of situation to another--from traditional to modern situations."

Ludruk "helps ludruk participants (when I use this term, I mean spectators as well as actors) to apprehend modernization movements in terms of vivid and meaningful symbolic classifications; second, it seduces ludruk participants into empathy with modes of social action involved in the modernization process; third, it involves the participants in aesthetic forms that structure their most general thoughts and feelings in ways stimulating to modernization processes."¹⁴³ Further, Peacock not only describes what ludruk does but shows how it does it.

Ludruk is not simple a "reflection" of the problems arising in modernizing Indonesian society; its social function is to create the forms through which modernization is possible.

Why is it not possible to investigate the effects of art in modern, complex technological societies? What is literature doing to people? For what purpose is it created and used? Ludruk is changing Javanese society; what is literature doing in our society? It is not enough to go on quoting line and verse from the sacred texts of

¹⁴³ James Peacock, Rites of Modernization: Symbolic and Social Aspects of Indonesian Proletarian Drama (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1968), p. 6.

Marxism. There is a great deal more in Marx than has been realized, and there are also plenty of issues that Marx and Engels scarcely touched upon. Marx himself certainly had no qualms about making raids on bourgeois thought; his whole system is a synthesis of British political economy, French radicalism, and German philosophy. It is now time for contemporary Marxist critics to realize that they must use all of Marx. When they do this they will discover that Marxism is a world view which is easily able to incorporate what is valuable and relevant from traditions which are essentially non-Marxist in their orientation.

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The Development of British Marxist Literary Theory:
Toward a Genetic-Functional Approach to Literary
Criticism

Major Advisor: Professor Ted E. Boyle, Director
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